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MORAL DIFFICULTIES

CONNECTED WITH

THE BIBLE:

BEING

THE BOYLE LECTURES FOR 1871,

PREACHED IN HER MAJESTY'S CHAPEL AT WHITEHALL.

BY

JAMES AUGUSTUS HESSEY, D.C.L.,

PREACHER TO THE HON. SOCIETY OF GRAY'S INN, PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON; LATE HEAD MASTER OF MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL.

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

JOHN,

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

WITH

THE AUTHOR'S AFFECTIONATE REGARDS.

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PREFACE.

This volume is an instalment of a more general design, and was not originally intended to be given to the public until that design had been carried out further in two other courses of Lectures.

But the Author was induced to change his intention by receiving an intimation from the Christian Evidence Committee, appointed in June 1870, by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, that they desired to include this in a series of works which they have at present in hand, with a view to the confutation of Unbelief.

He therefore placed it at the disposal of the Committee—with the understanding, on the

one hand, that the Lectures are published as they were written and preached, and, on the other, that he, and not the Society, is responsible for their contents.

Before he parts with them, he desires to say a few words, not in extenuation of their defects, of which he is fully conscious, but in reference to the following points:—

First—The nature of his general design.

Second—The nature of the particular design of this present course, and the degree in which he has carried it out.

Third—The style of the Lectures themselves.

Fourth—Some noticeable things in each of the Lectures.

1. The general design of the Author was rather to treat the case of the Unbeliever morally than to combat Unbelief as a purely speculative matter. He desired, as much as possible, to enter into the doubts and perplexities of those with whom he had to do; to state them as candidly as he could; and to give their holders credit for conscientious entertainment of them. His reasons for this

method of procedure, which he has ventured to term "the moral treatment of the Unbeliever," are set forth at large in the First or Introductory Lecture, and it is there shown to be applicable, more or less, to the whole field of Unbelief.

2. It was, however, impracticable to enter upon a field so extensive, or even to exhaust a portion of it, in one course of Lectures. The Author therefore determined upon limiting what he had to say this year to the discussion of certain Moral Difficulties connected with the Bible, which, if not met, are productive of unbelief. What he has aimed at may be expressed here in the terms of the formal programme:—

"The present course is intended to meet conscientious scruples suggested—by the character and acts of persons commended in the Bible; by God's commands—whether personal, as that to sacrifice Isaac—or judicial, as that to exterminate the Canaanites; by the scope of the precepts of Scripture; by its representation of God's attributes in the language of men; and

by M. Renan's allegations of moral defects in the Humanity of our Saviour."

It is a notorious fact, that objections founded upon these points are widely and pertinaciously circulated by infidel lecturers and in infidel publications. And it is no less notorious that many persons are so affected by them, as, in defect of principles on which to meet them, to be ready to give up the Bible, and betake themselves to Natural Religion. It seemed, therefore, desirable to endeavour to set forth, in a somewhat popular manner, at least a few of the principles needed, illustrated by such examples as might fix them in the memory, and thus induce a further application of them.

Upon such points as he has taken in hand the Author has done what he could, and, how imperfectly soever he has performed his task, he has been encouraged by the obvious interest exhibited by the congregation at Whitehall. Other Moral Difficulties connected with the Bible remain. These he hopes to be permitted to enter upon next year. Such are the following:—Difficulties as to the existence and em-

ployment of the imprecatory and comminatory Psalms, which, it is urged, could scarcely have been sanctioned by a God of Love. Difficulties as to the low ethical standard of the Book of Proverbs, which is said to be such as the Author of the highest morality could not have allowed to be delivered to mankind. Difficulties suggested by the contradictions presented by different parts of the Bible; these, it is alleged, exhibit evidences of having proceeded from different and imperfect minds, and are incompatible with the theory that the Bible was inspired by one Omniscient Mind. Difficulties arising from our Blessed Lord's method with His opponents as a controversialist, and from His apparent ignorance on various occasions; the former of these, it is said, offends the moral sense by its appearance of sophistry: the latter forbids men to believe that He was more than an ordinary person or of more than ordinary information. Difficulties as to the pretensions of the Apostles to have been "guided by the Spirit into all truth," seeing that their preaching and their correspondence exhibit remarkable and, it is alleged, unaccountable changes of tone, of doctrine, and of expectation.

3. As to the style of the Lectures, the Author had in view throughout an audience whose interest was to be aroused and sustained. He therefore avoided, as much as possible, elaborate didactic disquisition. If this excuse does not avail him, he has no other to offer. It should be added that the popular character of the Lectures seemed to preclude the necessity of notes and references, except in a very few instances. He has not omitted this apparatus from any affectation of originality, and he desires to acknowledge frankly that he has availed himself of whatever assistance came in his way.

4. The several Lectures will in a great measure explain themselves; but the following remarks may be made upon them:—

The First or Introductory Lecture traverses much the same ground, though with a different object, as the Author's address to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in June of last year. This will account for some coincidences of expression in the two documents. The story in *Hypatia* upon which Kingsley

founded the anecdote quoted in p. 19, occurs in substance in Neander's "General History of the Christian Religion and the Church," vol. v. p. 60, Torrey's Translation. But Radbod, king of the Frieslanders, and not Wulf, the Goth, is the hero of Neander's tale.

The general argument of the Second Lecture has, as is mentioned in a note, been already set forth by the Author in another form, as a tract, for an occasional purpose. But it has been supplemented by several additional instances, and especially by the notice of the Song of Deborah and Barak, and woven into the course to which it naturally belonged. It is scarcely necessary to state that the principles enunciated in this and in the Third Lecture are applicable to a large number of cases in the Bible, to which the reader is intended to apply them for himself, and which, in many instances known to the Author, have caused great perplexity. Among such cases would be the querulousness of Job, and his arraignment of the justice of the Almighty; the dissimulation of Isaac; the deceitfulness of Rebekah and Jacob; the murmuring of Aaron and Miriam; the lying of

"the old prophet who dwelt in Bethel," and the disobedience of his guest, "the man of God who came out of Judah;" the falling away of Asa; the weakness of Jehoshaphat; the vanity of Hezekiah; the hasty action of Josiah, which resulted in his death; the suppression of truth on one occasion by Jeremiah. And many others might be mentioned, as incidents in the biographies of men who either had a special mission entrusted to them, or have received a general commendation in the pages of Scripture.

The subjects of the Fourth and Sixth Lectures are confessedly difficult ones, and have been treated in a variety of ways. The Author has grappled with them to the best of his ability, and has carefully considered their treatment by others. To his regret, he has been unable to agree with Mr. Robertson as to the trial of Abraham, though he has derived two valuable hints from his notes upon it, viz., that "the history of the special transaction must be taken as a whole, the conclusion as well as the commencement," and that "the whole of Abraham's life was a trial, of which this special transaction

was the climax." And, to his regret also, he has been equally unable to agree with the method suggested by Dr. Arnold, in his "Essay on the Right Interpretation and Understanding of the Scriptures," so far as that Essay applies to the judicial action of the Israelites on the nations of Canaan and others.

It is on the authority of Dr. Macbride that, in the Fifth Lecture, the conversion of St. Francis of Assisi is attributed to his hearing the story of the "rich young man." The story is more generally told, as by Mrs. Oliphant, in her Life of the Saint, chap. iii. pp. 38, 39, of another passage: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, not yet staves. And, as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." St. Augustine had long before told much the same anecdote of St. Antony, the founder of the monastic system: "I had heard that Antony had come in during the reading of the Gospel, and had taken to himself the admonition, 'Go, sell all thou hast,' &c., and had turned to Thee at once, in consequence of that oracle."—(B.

Aug. *Conf.*, l. viii.: Newman's *Church of the Fathers*, p. 243 ; see also p. 345.)

Both the Sixth and the Seventh Lectures are intended rather to furnish specimens of the manner in which the difficulties treated of may be met by persons thinking for themselves, than to exhaust, or to attempt to exhaust, their respective subjects.

The Eighth Lecture aims at exposing the fallacies of M. Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, by simply divesting it of its embellishments, and causing it to appear in its intrinsic deformity. The Author trusts he has not performed this ungracious office uncandidly ; indeed, if anything, he fears he has erred in the direction of candour. The passage with which the lecture concludes is one of a series of noble Sonnets by the Rev. Charles Turner, the accomplished brother of Alfred Tennyson.

The Author has only to say in conclusion, that the Moral Difficulties in connection with the Bible of which he has treated are no imaginary ones. Most of them he has seen

urged recently, in infidel publications, and all of them are, covertly or openly, undermining the faith of many.

His earnest prayer is that God will bless this humble effort towards the confirmation of His Truth, and the setting forth of His Glory.

LECTURE I.

1 Samuel xvii. 28, 29.

And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?

What is to be done with Unbelievers and Unbelief? is the great religious question of our period. The days of personal oppression, of imprisonment, of *autos da fé*, are happily over. Men have discovered, after having tried them for centuries, that such measures are not merely inhuman, but that they are practically useless. It has at length dawned upon them that the law which made the blood of martyrs the seed of the Church has a wider operation than they suspected; that false opinions gather strength from the very sword which lops off this or that propagator of them: in other words, that some-

thing like a portion of Paley's first proposition has been turned against the Faith; that "The labours, dangers, and difficulties voluntarily undergone by men, solely in consequence of their persistence in their infidel statements, may be accepted as an evidence that those statements have, to say the least, a sort of probability on their side."

It is wonderful, or would be wonderful, did we not take into account the pertinacity of mankind in adhering blindly to a policy for the simple reason that it is found in existence, that the inexpediency of direct measures of repression by action against individuals should have required so long to bring it to light. Wonderful that the words which Latimer in his shroud at the stake addressed to his brother Ridley, should not have been appreciated as involving a much wider proposition. "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out," was a glorious sentence, a far-seeing, a faithful one. But logically it was an application of the wider sentence, "A sovereign way of propagating our opinions, and of inducing men to believe that we hold them to be true, is to suffer for the maintenance of them." There is a fountain of admiration, nay

of imitation, in the human heart, which is caused to gush forth abundantly and undiscriminatingly by the mere appearance of sincerity.

You will not, of course, understand me as urging that sincerity in the maintenance of opinions proves them to be true. St. Paul's subjective assurance of the doctrine of the resurrection, and his readiness to encounter death rather than surrender it, were no proof of the objective truth of that doctrine. Still—and this is very much to our purpose—they predisposed men to the reception of it, whether true or false.

And as coercive measures have failed to extinguish the race of professed and proselytizing unbelievers, so dogmatic proclamations, and the institution of the Index, and Papal decrees and anathemas, and, I may add, legal enactments, have failed to repress liberty and even licence of thought. We live in an age when nothing can check freedom of inquiry. Even among our own clergy, who have accepted certain Articles and certain Formularies, as the conditions of their teaching, there has recently prevailed an impatient and uneasy feeling of restraint. Those Articles and Formularies are under continual process of examination with a view to the dis-

covering either how little they enjoin, on the one hand, or how much they will allow, on the other. Hence, in one direction, such discussions as these: Is every part of the Bible inspired—or equally inspired? In another direction, Is what is not forbidden by the Rubrics of the Church admissible as a liturgical practice, provided only that what is actually enjoined is discoverable at the basis of the ministration? Measures, called ecclesiastical prosecutions, have been taken to repress these—I would not use the term offensively—eccentricities. Now one extreme, now another, has suffered a temporary discouragement. But prosecution has been considered by many to be synonymous with persecution. Sympathies with speculators have been called forth by public notice, though such sympathies would never have been commanded by their speculations had they been left unnoticed; and the legal, like the material sword of old, has been found powerless towards the repression of opinion. Even the indifferentist exclaims, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone." And the increasing crowd of partisans on either side goes on to adopt unhesitatingly the remainder of the sentence of Gamaliel, "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot over-

throw it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." (Acts v. 38, 39.)

But here, again, let me not be misunderstood. I am not pronouncing that great divergence of opinion amongst the clergy is desirable or undesirable, avoidable or unavoidable. I am not saying whether any, or how much, diversity of statement on the part of those who have accepted certain Articles or Formularies as conditions of teaching, is consistent or inconsistent with honesty of purpose. These are important questions indeed, and I should not shrink from approaching them at a fitting time. I am simply adducing the facts of their widespread prevalence, and of their irrepressible vitality, even among our clergy, as an evidence of the spirit which is abroad, and of which they are, under what may be considered the most unlikely circumstances, an undoubted manifestation.

But still the question recurs, "What is to be done with unbelievers and unbelief?" The Truth, or to use the specially Christian term, the *Faith*, has an objective character, or we should not have been desired by an apostle to contend earnestly for it. And the objective character of it being admitted, and also the obligation to assimilate it, that is, make it part and parcel of our own minds, being admitted

also, it cannot be a matter of indifference to us to find many of our brethren not merely failing to grasp it, but labouring to prove it to be a "baseless fabric of a vision." Belief in a God is, as we hold, a part of the constitution of man, when that constitution is not, from whatever cause, distorted or depraved. There is a certain Book in existence which we believe, on good grounds, to contain information concerning God, of which it is important that all should rightly make themselves masters. That Book enjoins us in the most solemn manner to be diligent in spreading that information to others. There is something within us — call it what we will, whether communicativeness, intellectually speaking, or brotherly love, morally speaking— which impels us vehemently and importunately to carry out this external command.

Under these circumstances the existence of unbelief is a reproach to God, the spectacle of an unbeliever a cause of sorrow to man. How is the one to be combated? how is the other, the being like ourselves, only, as we think, strangely or unhappily perverted, to be turned to better things—taught to value what *we* value—introduced to those same comforts in this life, and to those same hopes for what succeeds it, which *we* feel ourselves happy in having attained?

The old methods, to which allusion was made at the outset, I will suppose abandoned. There only remain two others—

1. The intellectual treatment of unbelief.
2. The moral treatment of the unbeliever.

Each of these runs into or overlaps the other, but they are distinguishable, and I will endeavour to distinguish them. The former has sometimes been called a systematic attack upon free inquiry. It is no such absurd attempt. Free inquiry cannot be put down. The mind can no more refrain from energizing upon the lofty matters which come before it, than the affections and passions from being aroused when their respective objects are presented to them. It is rather an ascertainment whether certain particular results of free inquiry in regard to the matters contained in the Faith are fairly maintainable or no. The very institution of this Lecture implies this. The Lecturer has to combat a great variety of assertions. Here are some of them. "There is no God. There is no personal God. The Bible is not from God, is unworthy of any idea of God, and is false in the aggregate. The Bible, though it comes from God, is to be received in part only, as in the Old Testament. The Bible may be received, indeed, but must be considered as in a great

measure superseded by after-revelations, such as Mahometanism or Mormonism, or supplemented by traditional teaching or developments. The Bible is to be divaricated, that is, separated into its true parts and its legends. The Bible is inconsistent in its moral teaching, is unhistorical, is poetical, is mystical, is mythical, is parabolical, and truth must be sought not on the surface but beneath it."

Well, whichsoever of these assertions, and the like, (for I have only mentioned a few specimens of them, taken at random,) the Lecturer has to combat, he concedes the point that free inquiry is legitimately exercised upon the matters which they respectively involve.

I have called such combat "intellectual treatment of unbelief, or dealing with unbelief in the abstract." It is that to which my predecessors in this Lecture have generally addressed themselves, from the time of the great Richard Bentley to the present hour. Some have taken one assertion in hand, and some another. I have not one word to say in disparagement of it. Indeed, in another place, I have urged classification and condensation of the literature already existing on the subject of unbelief, adaptation of it to the special phases which our own day presents, and promulgation of it, by the

hands of the Christian Evidence Society, in the quarters and among the men, where and in whose minds it is found. The reason of this is obvious. It is impossible to proceed one step unless we ascertain, and that with minute exactness, the nature of the opinions with which we have to do. I may have to trespass upon it, indeed I must necessarily do so to a considerable extent, in what I have to say hereafter.

When, however, I grant that I have nothing to say in disparagement of this method, I by no means grant that it should stand alone. It is too theoretic, too hard, too unsympathising, to prevail unassisted with beings who are not pure, unalloyed intellect—who are not mere machines for comprehending induction or deduction—but who are beings towards the forming of whose opinions the heart and the imagination have largely contributed, and who, moreover, have had their heart and imagination influenced by circumstances in a great degree beyond their control. No doubt there are abundant instances in which the intellect has been influenced by evil conduct, and in such cases, the very mind and conscience being defiled, men are afraid lest the Faith should be true, and take refuge in unbelief or unfaith. There is the vulgar profligate, who stifles his convictions as to Futurity and Judg-

ment, by the excitement of reviling the God whom he feels without him and within him, and by maligning the Book in which that God's view of his life and conversation is set forth. Such men, if they are to be converted at all, must be so, humanly speaking, either by their intellect being so convinced of the unpractical, unhistorical, unphilosophical, and injurious character of their views, as to commence an inquiry after other views; or by some striking event in their lives which recalls them to God and to themselves. But there are others, in fact there are many, who may be approached by a more gentle, a more humane, a more sympathetic procedure; and this procedure I venture to denominate "The moral treatment of the unbeliever."

But what do I mean by this?

I mean an endeavour on the part of him who would convert, to place himself for the time in the position of him on whom he would act, to enter into his history and surroundings, and to look at things from his point of view. This would involve a discussion of the circumstances, internal or external, which lead men or dispose men to reject the Bible, and even Natural Religion. The internal circumstances would be yearnings within, which have not met, though they might have met, satisfaction; the external

circumstances, what are termed accidents of position, education, or the lack of it.

This procedure I desire to adopt. Its popular character seems very suitable to addresses intended primarily for the ear, and it has, besides, so I venture to conceive, more than one advantage.

Of these, perhaps, not the least is the effect which it has on the temper of him who conducts the controversy. If a man combats unbelief in the abstract, he is likely to take up a hard, unsympathising position, and to regard himself as the impersonation or infallible exponent of what he desires to inculcate. Hence something almost like contempt for the intellect and heart of his opponent steals over him, a disposition akin to his who says Raca or Moreh in the Gospel; or, if not such contempt, yet disgust with and impatience at his undertaking. But let him take into consideration how his opponent became what he is: what untoward circumstances may have produced his misgivings: whether those misgivings are absolutely wrong in themselves, or wrong simply in their degree or direction; and whether he himself ever had such and such a tendency, which, had it not been better directed, might have made him even as that other is. Let a man say to himself,

"Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto." His high thoughts of self will vanish; he will be moved to that love of souls which begets love in return; he will abandon that struggle for victory which summons up, if not obstinacy, at least irritation in return.

And then for him with whom argument is to be held. We all know how encouraging it is to have it conceded that one's action, if not approved, is not wholly condemned; that one may have mistaken unwittingly, rather than wilfully misstated; that there is something like a common ground; that one is not wholly wrong; that possibly one may have been misunderstood. The reverse feelings are aroused by any assumption of superiority; by any imputation of motives; an expostulation like that of Eliab in the text: "I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart," produces a reply like David's: "What have I now done? is there not a cause?" But tender sympathy with one's case—"I know and enter into thy difficulties. I have either felt them myself, or have been guarded by such and such considerations from myself succumbing to them. Let us examine them as brothers together. Is not my heart as thy heart?" This once heard and felt, acerbity dies away.

It is not, however, merely admissible *ex hypothesi*, but capable of assertion as a matter of fact, that, in the words of Shakspere (*Henry V.* Act iv. Sc. 1):—

> "There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distil it out."

or that in those of Milton (*P. L.* Bk. ii.):—

> "Neither do the spirits damned
> Lose all their virtue."

In other words, error is generally the perversion of some truth which it has overlaid or obscured. And there are, even in perverted men, some yearnings, originally good, or originally harmless and indifferent, which, in lack of a legitimate or adequate object, have taken up with an unlawful or imperfect one. A very original thinker has observed this law, and urged the employment of it for the purposes of controversy with Romanists. The passage in which he does so, is as follows. I have omitted some of the dogmas which he places in the category of Romish errors, as I quote it merely for the general principle which it contains:—

"Purgatory, Mariolatry, seven sacraments instead of two, transubstantiation, invocation of saints—are each based upon a truth; but crys-

tallized into form, petrified into dogmas, they are false. Endeavour to trace the meaning contained in the Romish institutions; do not meet them with anathemas. Discover what the Roman Catholic means, translate to him his longing, interpret to him what he wants. I can conceive no more blessed work than this for the man of large heart and clear vigorous intellect."[1]

So writes Robertson, and I have no hesitation in avowing that his profound and suggestive words first imparted form and consistency to a persuasion which had been floating vaguely in my own thoughts: that unbelief must be assailed, if it is to be assailed successfully, not merely in the abstract, but in the concrete: that heart must speak to heart, and man to man—not mind to heart or man. True, I had long had before me St. Paul's model of controversy, his becoming all things to all men, that is, his adopting their special standpoint, and convincing them that he comprehended both what things were seen from it, and what things it necessarily concealed from their vision; and I had appreciated the voice at the Areopagus: "I perceive that ye are inclined to be

[1] Robertson's "Life," vol. ii. p. 161: from Sermon on Adoration of the Virgin.

religious already. I have seen an altar among you dedicated to an Unknown God. That shows you to be in search of an object for adoration. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." But the words above quoted were a practical application of all this, and they appeared to me to involve a principle capable of being applied, not merely to the Romanist who in his way is a perverter of the Faith, but to all who in any degree come under the term unbeliever, and are commended in the Church's Collect for Good Friday to the prayers and kind offices of their brethren.

To give full utterance to what I have conceived would indeed be a difficult task, in consequence of the variety of minds into which I should have to enter, and of the variety of circumstances which would necessarily come before me. At the utmost, a few only of them can be alluded to.

How is it, then, I would ask, that, if a man has unhappily become a Deist,[1] he not unfre-

[1] The terms Deist and Theist are often used synonymously, but, in these Lectures, a Deist is to be understood as one who has rejected Revelation and taken up a position actually hostile to it, besides falling back upon Natural Religion; a Theist is one who has simply, from whatever cause, abandoned, or missed of, Revealed, though he retains Natural, Religion.

quently proceeds further, and glides into Atheism? Is it not perchance because, having rejected what he calls "the earthly and material accessories of an Incarnation, and the metaphysical conception of distinct personal subsistences within the Godhead," his mind has nothing to repose itself upon, and he feels impelled to reject belief in any God whatever, or how spiritual soever? And is not this impulse, in part at least, due to an unconscious admission that, in the words of a writer already quoted, "an historical Christianity is absolutely essential; that only through a visible life of the Divinest in the Flesh can God become intelligible to men?" Might not this unconscious admission be made available as a basis for his conversion? And, on the other hand, as Deist thus glides into Atheist, how is it that by a reversed action the Atheist becomes a Deist? Why does he become a Fatalist, or a Pantheist, or a Materialist? Is it not because he is haunted by a feeling of responsibility which he endeavours vainly to disguise from himself by terms which concede nominally what they profess to negative really? For what is Fatalism etymologically, but subjection to a voice? and how shall a voice be heard without a Divine Speaker whose utterances pervade all worlds, even the world of a

man's heart? What is Pantheism, but a resolution of the divine into the material, and an attempt so to invest all things and all actions with divine goodness? The very attempt shows a desire to escape a felt responsibility. What is Materialism, when analysed, but a transfer of responsibility from self within to objects without, founded upon a false analogy between one kind of matter and another, between magnet and steel, for instance, and moral objects and their realization? Do not even these crude efforts imply that there is something in the minds of these men which may be wrought into form and configuration by the skilful and tender artist? Are they utterly unassailable if drawn by the cords of a man, that is, by entering into their feelings, and showing them how much they hold in common with you? And even that Materialist who affects a philosophy called Positivism, or that other who professes himself to be a Secularist, may not they be dealt with respectively? May not the Positivist be told, If I only granted your assumptions, that laws are the only objects of search; that laws have no operation except in the world of matter; that human action comes under the denomination of the world of matter; and that laws do not necessarily imply a lawgiver, your position

would be impregnable, and I should agree with you. But have you not yourself admitted that there may be a God, though you can know nothing about Him? And what is this but a concession on your part that you may have been deceived by a false analogy? Besides, observe the latest speculations of your school: the latest developments of Comte your apostle. What do they tend to, but either the acknowledgment that man cannot do without some object of worship,—call it collective humanity if you please; this is nothing but an aggregation of qualities which you call divine, and thus virtually concede to have come from a God,—or a worship of man's worst specimens, an indulgence in man's worst passions, utterly unworthy of the philosopher? Let us examine your positions together. And in dealing even with the Secularists—I mean, of course, some amongst them—might we not gain many converts by entering into their case, showing them how much of their mistake arises from the difficulty of their circumstances; from their struggle to live here, which has engrossed their whole attention; from the apparently hopeless inequalities of human lots; and by active sympathetic endeavours so to amend their temporal condition as to beget a belief that He exists

above who manifests Himself in His disciples' works of love below.

The case of the heathen abroad, who, whether Polytheists or Idolaters, may come under the denomination of unbelievers called Theists, I will not now enlarge upon. I confess, however, that I am persuaded that in many cases our missionaries begin at the wrong end: that they have not proceeded with that consideration for human prejudices and pre-existent beliefs, or half-beliefs, or misbeliefs, which characterized the evangelization of St. Paul. "Whom ye ignorantly worship—for I agree with you so far, in worshipping Him—Him declare I unto you," were a better model of procedure than the abrupt declaration that they are absolutely lost unless Christianity is straightway embraced in its integrity. You will remember that story in *Hypatia* which Kingsley vouches to be a fact: "how the Gothic chieftain Wulf had been persuaded to accept baptism, and was in the act of stepping into the font; but how, at that very moment, he suddenly turned to the bishop, and asked where were the souls of his ancestors? And on the prelate answering, 'In hell,' he drew back from the font, and drawing his bearskin cloak about him, declared 'He would prefer to go to his own people,' and so died

unbaptized, and went to his own place." And I also pass by the classes who lie on the borderland of Theism and Christianity—as the Jews, who accept only a portion of Revelation; and the Mahometans and Mormonites, who have added to it what they term after-revelations; or those, again, who object to the Finality of the Gospels, as if the old Christ were exhausted, and a new era, including a Church of the future, were about to dawn: though even here, I believe that conversion would be better promoted by search for agreement than by direct antagonism. I come next to those who, though professing to believe in Christianity and the Bible, have adopted imperfect, or, at best, strange views of both. These would not allow themselves to be termed unbelievers, but they are at the best half-believers, and their speculations tend towards unbelief. Be they, however, what they may, Straussites, representing our Blessed Lord to be a mere myth; or Renanites, divesting His story of what they term legendary accretions, and reducing Him to a very imperfect man: be they Arians, calling Him God only in a secondary sense; or Socinians, denying Him any Godhead at all; or Rationalists, explaining away His miracles: let them be persons finding in Scripture, difficul-

ties relating to God's moral government, or the standard of morality apparently approved in Scripture, difficulties on historical points, on natural history, on natural science, and the like; or contradictions which appear to them irreconcileable with the theories of inspiration which they have been taught; let them even be Socialists, overlooking what Scripture says as to the origin and progress of evil, and tracing it entirely to superficial disarrangements which must be adjusted irrespectively of higher sanctions;—how may they be best met? Surely, unless they be the very worst of their schools, by the controversialist's throwing himself into their position as much as possible: by his saying, "I know your perplexity: it commences only at a certain point; up to that point we agree, and I rejoice that we do so. I am not struggling for victory, but I think I can exhibit to you the principles which are at the foundation of my belief, and the lack of which has caused what I term, not reproachfully indeed, but sorrowfully, your divergence from the Faith."

This method, which I venture to call the moral treatment of the unbeliever, I shall endeavour to follow out in these Lectures. It is intended to set persons upon guiding them-

selves, by walking to a certain distance in their company. A remarkable illustration of it is supplied by Mr. Stopford Brooke in a passage quoted by him (vol. ii. p. 169) from one of Robertson's unpublished sermons, and in his own remarks upon it. There he shows how a Socinian may be led to an acknowledgment of the Divinity of Christ. It is by the recognition of what he terms, "the value even of Socinians up to a certain point; by acknowledging that to them has fallen the task of exhibiting more than others the truth of the Humanity of Christ. And from comprehension of their standpoint with great clearness and sympathy, he leads them with him to his own platform."

I may add a second illustration. It would surely be a better method of treating the work called "Ecce Homo," to consider that the author is rather a person seeking God in Christ in an unusual manner, than one to be branded as a covert Socinian. The charitable estimate of Dr. Payne Smith might be our guide: "In those pages we begin with a man, but a man endowed with the power of working miracles; and as we proceed, and learn more of his doings, no other conclusion seems possible than that to which, perhaps, the writer meant to lead

us, namely, 'Ecce Deus.'"[1] Or we might take the deliberate judgment of a great layman, one of the profoundest thinkers of our day, who has carefully analysed it. "By argument we may, I have thought, show that to approach our Lord, and to paint the sacred portrait on the human side, is no unlawful process; and likewise that when the secondary and intermediate authorities are disregarded, it may be wise thus to seek at once for access to the presence of the Great King, and to sit among the listeners at His feet. But the question of questions remains; when we arrive in that presence, how does it make good its claims to supreme majesty and supreme command? To me it appears that each page of the book breathes out as it proceeds what we may call an air, which grows musical by degrees, and which, becoming more distinct even as it swells, takes form, as in due time we find, in the articulate conclusion, 'Surely this is the Son of God; Surely this is the King of Heaven.' 'And they shall call His name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us.'"[2]

But to return. In what I have stated thus

[1] Bampton Lectures, p. 359.

[2] Mr. Gladstone's Review of "Ecce Homo." Part ii. in *Good Words* for February 1868.

far, it has been necessary to travel over a wide field of opinion. My object in doing so has been twofold. First, to exhibit the multitudinous ramifications of Unbelief, and so to evince that it is no mere shadow with which issue is to be joined. Secondly, to indicate the method in which certain forms of Unbelief will be met in detail, by showing generally, how that method might be applied to so large a variety of forms. One thing I wish to observe. Let no man suppose for a moment that a word has been said or will be said in palliation of any system of Unbelief. Far from it. The systems of Deism, of Socinianism, of any Straussite or Renanite Christology, of everything, in fact, which diminishes the honour of God, of the Bible, of the scheme of Redemption, have and ought to have our unqualified opposition. Only, we may charitably try to understand, and so to rescue, those who, unfortunately for themselves, hold, and unfortunately for others, are instruments in propagating, such systems. It is most important to *distinguish between erroneous systems* and *erring men.* Is an example needed of the distinction intended? Then contemplate God, abhorring *sin*, yet, in Christ, profoundly compassionating, and providing restoration for, *the sinner.*

I have said already that it would be difficult to give full utterance to what I have conceived. I may add, it would be impossible to do so in one course of lectures. I have determined therefore, in this course, to address myself specifically to the case of those who feel themselves propelled towards mere Theism, by difficulties which their moral sense finds, or thinks it finds, in the Bible. These persons have been brought up in the knowledge of the Bible, and are not disinclined to recognize it as the Book of God. But they are assailed in popular publications by the presentation of a variety of objections founded, nearly all of them, on the following specious questions:— Can a document be accepted as coming from God which offends the moral sense? Had not a man better become a Theist, preserving his moral sense unsullied, than remain a Christian and admit a document which offends it? The former of these questions they of course answer in the negative. The publications to which I allude adduce instances from the Bible which, it is alleged, go counter to the moral sense. These instances they cannot meet by any immediate explanation. Hence they see no escape from an affirmative answer to the second question. Consistency requires them to act upon it. They fly to Theism, and, it

may be, eventually advance further into the dreary regions of unbelief.

At present, then, I confine myself to their case, though I propose, if God permit, to take a wider range in a future course of lectures.

As, however, their case has several distinct manifestations, I shall divide them thus, and consider separately—

1st. Those who doubt whether the conduct of persons commended in Scripture, or the acts sanctioned by God's command in Scripture, be not so inconsistent with what would *à priori* be expected there, as to create either a suspicion of the inspiration of the document, or a confusion of all ideas of morality. This will occupy Three Lectures.

2ndly. Those who are perplexed at finding in a book intended for all time, first, precepts which seem either indifferent in themselves, or if not indifferent at the time of their utterance, obsolete and inapplicable to the present time; and secondly, precepts which seem applicable to no time, and which, if carried out literally, would render it impossible for society to go on. This will form the subject of the Fifth Lecture of the series.

3rdly. Those who cannot reconcile the apparently undiscriminating destruction of whole

communities recorded in the Bible, even to man's idea of justice and retribution, and are much less able to reconcile it to any idea worthy of the justice of God. This will form the subject of the Sixth Lecture.

4thly. Those who are offended with the anthropomorphic expressions found in the Bible, which, they urge, are inconsistent with the idea of a God "without body, parts or passions, and of infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness." This will form the subject of the Seventh Lecture.

5thly. Those who, taking their idea of Christ from Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, and imagining the portrait given there to be fairly drawn from the Gospels, fail to recognize Him even as a Perfect Man. This Lecture will conclude the course.

I shall endeavour to throw myself thoroughly into the case of each of these classes of persons, and to adopt, as nearly as I can, the standpoint of each. I shall wish to show that, however untenable their opinions be, they are often, considering the standpoint of the maintainers, evidence not necessarily of perverseness, but frequently of mistake; and that when the mistakes respectively are removed, there is good hope that belief may resume its sway over them. In the process of removing these mistakes, I shall sometimes have to suggest a principle of

interpretation which may have escaped the notice of those entertaining them; sometimes to sympathise with their yearnings, but to show that they have been fixed on an inadequate object; sometimes to substitute a sounder theological teaching for that which has been ordinarily and unreflectingly acquiesced in; sometimes to show that they have adopted an inaccurate view of the relation of the Bible, and its contents and teachings, to other things and to life; sometimes to admit that different ages of the world require different methods of conveying truth to men's minds and hearts, and that a stereotyped method, as it is not to be expected *à priori*, so it is not enjoined in the Bible. And in all cases, I shall hope to take into consideration their peculiar social position and peculiarities of moral and mental temperament.

Even thus I feel that I have a very arduous and delicate task before me. I pray God to aid me in it, and to enable me by candour and gentle allowance to elicit a candid spirit from my brethren in return. And let it be no reproach that I use, for lack of a better term, the word *Unbeliever*. With me it does not impute bad motives, or bad designs, but implies that, from whatever conjuncture of circumstances, the

person thus designated is, or is in danger of becoming, a holder of what is in excess or in defect of the truth. That belief has no difficulties, or that "pride and naughtiness of heart" is necessarily the cause of their entertainment, is not my position. It is rather, that its difficulties result so frequently from conditions of mind and heart amiable in themselves, or from circumstances which men can scarcely help, but which they would fain escape from, that the charitable work of their solution may not unfairly be called a discovery of

"Some soul of goodness in things evil."

LECTURE II.

HEBREWS xi. part of vv. 32, 38.

The time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae, of David also, and Samuel: of whom the world was not worthy.

"DOES the acceptance of Christianity and its documents as Revelations from God supersede the moral sense?

"We fear it does.

"Or if not exactly this, does it not dull or pervert the moral sense by necessitating a system of casuistry and special pleading in order to reconcile the voice without to the voice within?

"We fear it does.

"And if either of these is the case, (and one does not see how the admission of one or the other is to be avoided,) is not the believer compelled to parody, in a manner which leads to the most frightful Antinomianism, that line of Pope:

'He can't be wrong, whose life is in the right,'

into

'He can't *do* wrong, whose faith is in the right.'

"We fear he is."

Utterances like these, brethren, appear to be, and indeed are, very shocking. But they have been made not unfrequently by those whom Miller, in his "Bampton Lectures," calls "respectful Unbelievers:"—*i.e.* by persons who give up Christianity *not* from hatred of its doctrines as condemnatory of their own practice, but from despair of their scruples being relieved. It is but fair, therefore, as that author observes, to "estimate the solid weight of their scruples with that fit measure of candour towards them, which may at once render us merciful to a condition in which we would not stand for worlds, and most truly thankful to the heavenly Comforter whose grace has saved us from it."[1]

Let us put ourselves, then, for the time in their place—see what their exact difficulties are—how they have sprung up, and on what principles, or by what considerations, they may be removed. It would be lamentable, indeed, if we permitted them to be drawn to mere Theism, either through their own mistake, or through neglect on our part to correct it.

Their difficulties, then, appear to have arisen mainly from the verses in the Epistle to the

[1] Miller, Bampton Lectures, p. 73.

Hebrews which I have selected for my text, though of course similar difficulties are suggested by other names occurring in the same chapter.

"Well, with regard to these names, we consult," they say, "the Old Testament, and we find concerning their owners a commendation, purporting to have been uttered by Samuel: 'The Lord sent Jerubbaal (or Gideon), and Bedan, (who is probably Barak,) and Jephthah, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies, and ye dwelled safe.'[1] Of course, our next step is to inquire when did these men, whom the Old Testament declares to be God-sent men, and of whom the New Testament says, the world was not worthy of them, flourish, and what was their character. They seem to be commended to our imitation—we are entitled, if we acknowledge Him who is declared to be their sender and commender, to expect them to be, not men lower than ourselves, but men of the highest moral tone, models of personal and social excellence for their own time and for all time.

"On looking, however, into the authorized or at least the ordinarily received history of their era, what do we find recorded: 1st, of the period, 2nd, of these men?

[1] 1 Samuel xii. 11.

"As for the period,[1] we find it to be one which may not be unaptly called the heroic age of Hebrew history—the age, that is, of physical superiority as distinct from moral influences. To enter into it at all, we are obliged to imagine a most unsettled state of society, in which every man is 'fighting for his own hand,' and of which personal displays of individual valour are the most striking and prominent characteristics. We hear, indeed, every now and then, that the land, or a portion of it, had rest for a certain number of years; but of this rest we have no detailed description. It seems rather to be the lassitude ensuing on some great border contest, than any established and settled state of tranquillity. We wait a very little while. There arises before us some new phase of oppression or of rapine. It is avenged or terminated, not by the efforts of a mighty nation, by concentrated force and matured resolve, but by a sort of *guerilla* warfare, which reminds us of the struggles of later days in Switzerland, in the Tyrol, or in the Spanish Peninsula.

"And who are leaders in this warfare? and what are their methods of conducting it?

[1] The general argument of this Second Lecture has been already set forth by the author in another form, as a Tract, for an occasional purpose.

"Men are raised up for each emergency, whose bodily prowess and daring hardihood seem almost those of the fabled personages of classic story. These lead their countrymen to victory, or personally assail their oppressor. Thus, Eglon is lording it over Israel: an Ehud is found who will penetrate into his palace, and despatch him in his inmost chamber. Thus, Jabin is mightily oppressing God's people: straightway the captain of his host is sold into the hand of a woman, and those who had been at peace with him become his betrayers and murderers. Thus, under some forms of servitude, weapons of offence are forbidden: an ox-goad or the jaw-bone of an ass becomes in the hand of some stalwart champion an instrument of destruction to an army. 'While a staff or a hempen stalk grows in the fields,' (says an eloquent writer on the subject,) 'or a smooth stone lies in the brook, the oppressed ones are furnished with artillery.'[1] Such are the prominent features of this disordered period, and such are the chief figures who appear on its foreground. They are called indeed *Judges*, but, with some few exceptions perhaps, we are not especially struck with their character in this point of view. We are more struck with finding

[1] Blunt, "Undesigned Coincidences," p. 124.

them occasionally men of craft and subtilty, occasionally men of licentious lives, occasionally men of cruelty and rapine; and in nearly all cases men of a lower standard of practice than the general tenor of what is called God's law appears to sanction, and than our moral sense can approve.

"Now," the perplexed objectors continue, "we should find it perfectly easy to pass a critical opinion upon this as upon every other uncivilized or heroic age, (for unhappily these terms are all but synonymous,) but if we are to be Christians we are required to do very much more; we are required, so we understand the matter, to approve the conduct of the agents. We are said to be dealing with the Word of God, and with records which He has caused to be preserved for our learning. Yet such things are chronicled concerning them, as reduce us to this very distressing dilemma. *If* we approve of the character of the Judges, and of all the acts of even the best among them, we go counter to our moral sense. And *if* we presume to censure them, we may be reversing the sentence of One who is called the Great Discerner of hearts. It is surely the simpler and the safer course, as we cannot admit Christianity without thus outraging ourselves, to deny it altogether. We have

heard, indeed, of a doctrine by which such inconsistency may be got over. We have been told that a positive command of God to do evil overrules the moral duty to do good and to refrain from evil. But we more than suspect the honesty and straightforwardness of this doctrine. And as for that other wild notion, that he can be right within, whose acts violate what should be found within, we relegate it to the dissolute fanatics who called themselves the Family of Love, and disgraced what is termed the Reformation."

Such, then, are the objections which I have put into the mouth of those whom I have supposed to reflect upon external Revelation as containing matters which are opposed to their sense of right and wrong. I proceed to offer a few suggestions which may aid them in their difficulties. They may serve, if not to remove them at once, yet to pave the way for their removal. We acknowledge that, at first sight, the things to which they object appear to be "hard things," and we respect a candid objector much more than a facile admitter of what he cannot understand. A tender conscience deserves to be satisfied.

But to our task.

We have spoken of candour—we will try to exemplify it.

It shall be conceded then at the outset, whatever results seem likely to follow from such a concession, that the morality of the Judges, on the whole, was not such as the Lord of conscience, whom we identify with the Inspirer of Scripture, can contemplate with approval. He who "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" can never see violence, and lust, and cruel habitations without anger. The covenant-keeping God can never be pleased with treachery. He who is a jealous God is necessarily provoked at idolatry. Yet still, allowing all this, we may find a way of regarding the Judges, in which they are to be considered "worthies" and heroes of the Faith. We may find that for God to employ even such persons as they were, on singular and special missions, is not unparalleled in Scripture, but rather according to the analogy of the Faith. And we may find further, that it is no less compatible with His ordinary dealings with mankind, that if they accepted His singular and special missions in strong and ready faith, and wrought them out with zeal and diligence, He should reward them, as He rewarded faithful Abraham.

The condition of the children of Israel from the time of the death of Joshua till at least the accession of Saul, was in many respects most

miserable. "The Lord was indeed their King," as heretofore, but they ignored His Royalty. For all practical purposes the saying of the historian is correct, "There was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes;" an expression which points at once to a widespread perversion of morality and to an absence of acknowledgment of anything like government. Their sins led them into slavery. From slavery they had to be redeemed by war, and all its accompanying discomforts. In the words of Deborah's painful confession, "The highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways; the inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel."[1] Generation after generation this state of things went on. Education, and even domestic care, ceased. Engaged as he necessarily was in warfare, and uncertain whether he might not be, in an unguarded moment, deprived of house and home, the father had no time to teach his son in the ways of God, even were he disposed to do so. The son grew up in his turn, in the midst of great and even greater difficulties, a person quite as occupied, and, from his own lack of instruction, less likely to instruct his descen-

[1] Judges v. 6, 7.

dants. At length the fear of God became the exception, and ignorance of His law the rule. The whole nation became deeply demoralized, and even the most worthy members of it were to a great extent affected by the general demoralization. Their low moral standard was doubtless in itself, and in the abstract, displeasing to the great Author of morality. But He does not estimate men in the abstract. He estimates them according to the opportunities they have possessed, and according to the uses which they have made of them. Do they act up to His law, so far as they know it? Do they walk uprightly, so far as the dim light about them and around them permits them to do so? By the answers to these questions He determines their final condition. Thus, deficiencies which would be, and are, inexcusable in us, might not prevent the acceptance of men who, like the Judges of the Israelites, were in darkness indeed, but still to a certain extent walked as children of light.

This, then, is our first position. The Judges having been imperfectly instructed in the Law, could scarcely have been expected to exhibit the high and pure morality which ensues on better instruction. They may therefore, according to God's general dealings, be accepted for

obeying what instruction they had. What this instruction amounted to we shall see presently. We proceed, however, to lay down a second position which seems to be imperatively required in order to a right determination of the matter now before us. It is then, we conceive, a principle which may be fairly drawn from Holy Scripture, that God employs as His instruments in conducting the affairs of men, persons who are to a certain extent such as they have made themselves, or such as their day has made them. He has, in the designs of His providence, works of a stern and ungentle character which must be performed, and vengeance which must be carried into execution, as well as works of evident love and rewards of faithful walking. For these utterly diverse purposes He chooses in His supreme wisdom human agents of a diverse character. And they, sometimes consciously indeed, but for the most part unconsciously, are instruments to perform His pleasure. He does not, so far as we can discover, effect a change in their disposition, still less does He express approbation of those whom He thus employs, either wholly, or even in particular parts of their conduct, unless indeed in those parts they have consciously acted under His command,

and felt that they were obeying Him and not merely their own will.

This, then, will account for the fact that God employed for the warlike and sometimes relentless task of extirpating His own and Israel's enemies, men of the fierce and almost savage nature which appears in some of the Judges. The office which was to be performed was such as demanded such agents. And it will at the same time teach us that He might use their passions and hardihood without sanctioning their general character in the abstract, or at all bidding us become, in any matter which our moral sense disapproves, the sort of men that they were. And this is perfectly compatible with the fact that some commendation is pronounced on these men. For, first, from whatever circumstances, they were superior to the age in which they lived; and secondly, which is much more to our purpose, they obeyed God's intimation conveyed to them on certain points, and obeyed it with earnest zeal. However imperfect, nay, let us speak boldly, however bad they were, on points whereon they were not informed, on these other they were comparatively perfect; God gave them a mission, and they performed it. They performed it with an unswerving faith; for that faith they

are praised, and their names are in the Book of Life. That performance constituted their trial, and on their going through with it depended their final justification.

With these reflections to direct us we may admit that, in spite of their general character, the Lord, in the words attributed to Samuel, might "have sent" the Judges, and that, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, those Judges might, "through faith, obtain a good report," supposing them to have wrought their work with patience. But let us further illustrate what is meant, by examining somewhat in detail the cases of Gideon, and of Barak, (with which will be considered some utterances connected with Jael, at which men have greatly stumbled,) of Jephthah, of Samson, of Samuel, and of David. These are nearly all of them mentioned, either in the Old Testament, or in the New Testament, with an approval, which, from want of explanation of their case, has made men, but we consider without sufficient cause, unbelievers.

First Gideon comes before us. He was a man of the tribe of Manasseh, who had been brought up in the worship of Baal; his family were noted idolaters, and zealous for the dignity of their idol. Gideon it seems was attached to the

false religion of his clan, but not so much so but that his heart was touched by the remonstrances of one of the prophets, and thus prepared somewhat for a further enlightenment. Be this however as it may, it was a perilous task for him to assail the dominant superstitions, and to stand forth as the assertor of a purer worship. Still, when God's word was revealed to him by an angel, and a miracle had confirmed the vision, no fears or prejudices of education could restrain him. He cast down the altar of Baal, and proclaimed himself the leader of Israel in the name of that truer God whose altar he had erected upon its ruins. Confirmed by another miracle, he became more valorous still, and more confident in his Divine mission; he saw his army diminished by degrees to the smallest possible number, though the Midianite troops were before him, "as grasshoppers for multitude;" he had the simplest method of assault to meet their numerous hosts well fitted with munitions of war. And yet, with these and other discouragements in his way, he kept his mission in view, and conducted it to a prosperous termination. The thousands of the enemy were overthrown, their princes were slain with the sword, and Israel was enabled to dwell safely.

"The time would fail me," says the writer to the Hebrews, "to tell of Gideon;" that is, of the excellence of Gideon's faith, as displayed in his adventurous career. He was far, indeed, from being a perfect man; there were serious defects in his character, which, viewed in the clear light of God's law, are manifest sins, and, had he been better instructed in it, would have been grievous sins in him. He went astray in the matter of chastity; he went astray in allowing the golden ephod, which he had set up to commemorate his triumph, to become an object of idolatry. Of these things we cannot without impiety suppose the Almighty to have approved; nor may we in these things consider Gideon worthy of imitation. But he used what light he had; he walked, unscared by dangers, in the path which God had clearly marked out for him. And had he had further revelations, whether coming from within or from without, we may believe he would have been wiser and better. For his obedience, then, to what was revealed to him, if we may so far decipher the counsels of God, and the intimations afforded to us in His Word, and the feelings of our own hearts, we may suppose Gideon to have been commended by an inspired writer, and accepted, (for His sake who

is the cause of all acceptance,) by that writer's Lord and Master.

In what has been said, and will be said in this Lecture, an equitable judgment of men on the part of God is assumed both as to this life and as to what comes after it: the documents from which the narratives are taken are supposed to be inspired, and the miracles to be an admitted portion of them. This is necessary to our present argument, but it will not of course prejudice our free discussion of these disputed points bye and bye.

We come next to Barak. His name appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and is possibly latent in the name Bedan in the Old Testament. At any rate the constituent letters in the original may have easily become interchanged as bearing no distant resemblance to each other. Indeed the Septuagint actually read Barak in the passage. (The Chaldee Paraphrast inserts Samson instead, translating the word Ben-Dan or Bedan, and applying it to him, as being an offspring of the family of the Danites. But upon this, and another conjecture that Bedan was Jair, we need not dwell.)

But to return.

The case of Barak, with whom must be associated the prophetess Deborah, at whose insti-

gation he appears to have acted, requires explanation; not so much in consequence of what the two did, but of what the two said in their Song recorded in Judges v., and of the assumption that their Song was divinely inspired. For, putting aside the fact that they were engaged in war—in itself an ungentle task, but one surely justified by the circumstances of their country's oppression—they seem, both of them, so far as their lives go, to have been for their age blameless, and even praiseworthy. And Barak's courage and earnestness in carrying out his mission when his momentary hesitation was dispelled by the assurance that Deborah, allowed to be a prophetess, would co-operate in the enterprise, and that, woman though she were, the Lord would sell Sisera into her hands, are surely worthy of commendation, and may be commended without any violence being done to our moral sense. But their story has what we may indeed term a distressing parenthesis, the slaughter of Sisera by Jael: and, as if this were not enough, that deed, a violation of every law of hospitality, ancient and modern, appears to be praised by Deborah and Barak. Even this is not all. In the course of the Song appear the words, "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be." A descrip-

tion of her treachery follows. And it would seem as if God approved it—for the Song is supposed to be inspired. Must not our moral sense revolt at such approval? And can even that unsatisfactory theory be sufficiently established that Jael was praised by persons acting under a Divine inspiration, because her moral sense was overruled for the time by a positive command from the Almighty? The narrative, at any rate, affords not the slightest hint of any such command having been given, and even if it did, this would only increase our difficulty. If Jael did her act in contravention of the moral law, how could God, speaking through Deborah and Barak, approve of it? If Jael did her act under a positive divine command, how are we to be certified of this, and what are we to think of Him who overrules His general injunction to do good by a positive order or permission in a particular instance to do evil? To commend a person's general earnestness, which is the Christian advocate's argument, is one thing; to commend a certain wicked and treacherous act is another.

A full answer to this difficulty I must reserve until I can consider the subject of the inspiration of Scripture as a whole. Meanwhile, however, I may say thus much: the Book of

Judges may be granted to be inspired. But what does this guarantee, in reference to the Song in question, and to the act of Jael commended in that Song? Surely no more than that Jael certainly did the act, and that the sentiments uttered in the Song were certainly uttered by Deborah and Barak in the flush of victory. This is a very different thing from asserting that the Almighty enjoined a deed abhorrent to the moral sense, or praised the agent in such a deed by authorizing the voice of those who were for the time His ministers. The exultant words,[1] with the fierce spirit that underlay them, must be classed with the infirmities of character which are found in other Scripture personages, whose straightforward conduct and earnestness in fulfilling their mission approved them to God. They must no more be supposed to be sanctioned by the Almighty, or recommended to man's imitation, than Abraham's moral cowardice on two occasions, or Jacob's hard dealing with Esau and the deceit he practised on his aged father, or other matters we shall have to mention in the cases of other men who come under our review. Sometimes, indeed, God directly expresses His

[1] The inspiration which we accord to the divine songs called *The Psalms*, stands on other grounds, which are perfectly satisfactory, but cannot be entered upon here.

disapproval of immoral acts or words either by verbal sentence, or by unmistakeable punishment of the transgressors, or, as in the case of David, by both means. But, generally, He leaves us to our moral sense, which, as it proceeds from Him, and is His illumination of our souls, will, unless we puzzle ourselves with casuistical devices and special pleading, in the main lead us aright.

If it is true that in order to inflict vengeance on hardened offenders, and to manifest His power to the world, God sometimes in Holy Scripture commands operations such as the extirpation of the Canaanites, which, such command being supposed away, man's moral sense would have judged unlawful, it is true that in His omnipotence He employs the passions of men to bring about His own great and inscrutable ends. But it does not follow either that He approves of all the things which occur in the course of such operations, or that the perverted passions of men are in themselves well pleasing to the God of purity and love. Defensive war may be, and is, allowable to Christians. But this does not hallow all the evil deeds and evil passions which occur in the course of it, or are called forth by it. Every day we do things from which evil consequences

arise. We compete in trade, and some of our neighbours are ruined; we fabricate drugs for medicinal purposes, or wine to make glad the heart of man; some persons poison or intoxicate themselves. Did we contemplate ruining, or poisoning, or intoxicating those particular persons, we might be blamed. We are not blameable, because these are not the necessary, but the accidental, consequences of our action.

But we come next to Samson.

From his earliest age, we are told, "The Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times, in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol."[1] He evidently had a mission to break the oppression practised on Israel by the Philistines, and for the performance of this mission, for pursuing it to the very end of his career, and to the loss even of his own life, he has praise in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We find, however, no commendation bestowed by the Almighty on the particular acts of wanton cruelty by which he carried out his mission, or on the episodes, as we may term them, of profligate proceedings which occur in his life. These, therefore, are not to be imitated by us any more than those wrong acts of Gideon, of which we have spoken already.

[1] Judges xiii. 24, 25.

And then there is the case of Jephthah. The earlier part of his career speaks volumes of the immorality and social disorder which prevailed in his day. He was the son of a harlot, and had been thrust out from his father's house by his legitimate brethren: "And Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him." How long he led the careless and freebooting life which these words imply does not appear. But a change at length came over him. We find him captain over Israel against the Ammonites, and "uttering all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh." "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah;" he became a champion for the faith and for God's heritage, and never ceased from his efforts until "the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel."

It was for this earnestness in his ascertained mission, it was because in execution of it "he waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens," that God accepted Jephthah. His rash and unhallowed vow, the no less rash and unhallowed performance of it which issued in the death of his daughter, (for we need not seek to explain this away,) his haughty and remorseless temper, were doubtless offensive

in God's sight. But for these he found pardon, because, like St. Paul, he sinned in ignorance. In the chief trial of his life he found acceptance, because he displayed faithful obedience.

But what shall be said of David? He is expressly declared in Scripture to be "a man after God's own heart"—and yet deeds are recorded of him, one of which "gave great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," as even a prophet admitted, and many of which have staggered those who would fain believe in God, but chiefly because of his inconsistencies are unable to do so.

A very short consideration will enable us to see that David was commended, not for his sins, for at some of those God manifested His displeasure both by open punishment and by the darkness and horror which He caused to descend upon his soul, but for his ready surrender of himself to the Divine leading. It is not, indeed, declared to us that all that David did wrongly was punished in this life, and to suppose that this was so would be to limit the scheme of Providence to what occurs on this side the veil. But punishment enough fell upon him—dissension in his family, loss of the child who was the fruit of sin, rebellion on the part of his most loved son, dishonour to his concubines, misery

inflicted on his people, suffering of personal contumely and exile,—to show that God disapproved of what he had done amiss. Meanwhile, though the sacred historian faithfully records many questionable acts that David performed, as the slaughter of the kinsmen of Saul, and the treatment of the Ammonites, (supposing this to be rightly understood,) and many questionable words, such as his latest injunctions to Solomon respecting Shimei and Joab, which are not punished, it is by no means necessary to hold that they are approved by the Almighty. The presumption is quite the other way, when the disapprovals, actually recorded, are taken into account. Here, as in other cases, we are permitted, and indeed bound, to use our moral sense. It is God's gift, and like His other gifts, not to be distorted or dulled, but to be diligently and reverently employed.

With all his failures, aggravated as they no doubt were, by his position, and by the neglect of the Divine aid given to him, David may, without reproach to the judgment of the Almighty, be numbered among those who, with some imperfections, fulfilled their mission. By this faith, he pleased God; and his faith, and not his failures, is the point commended to our imitation.

David was not, of course, one of the Judges, but I suppose he was placed among them, as having had a similarly special call. We have one more Judge proper to consider—Samuel: his case presents us with less difficulty. From his first calling to his death his character is more subdued, and his morality is more pure, than those of most of the Hebrew Judges. But it is not even for this that his praise is recorded in the Old Testament, or repeated and confirmed in the New. Much less is he praised for his criminal indulgence to his sons, or for the exact manner of his accomplishment of the death of Agag. No, rather he is praised for faithfully performing his appointed mission; and apart from his excellencies or his defects, for this he obtained the testimony that, through faith, he was pleasing unto God.

Having now gone through our task, may we not speak to "the respectful Unbeliever," whose doubts we have endeavoured to meet, somewhat in this wise:

"You see, then, the reasonableness of the commendation given in Scripture to certain Hebrew chieftains whom God raised up from time to time for special and extraordinary services, whom He enlightened to see their duty, so far as those services were concerned, and whom He

praised for faithfully performing them, without at all authorizing the more questionable portions of their conduct. Our method of considering the matter will relieve us from both the difficulties with which we commenced our inquiry. We are not bound to defend the morality of the Judges in every, or nearly every particular, and thus our moral sense may escape offence and perplexity. And, again, though we censure some parts of their conduct, yet, if we imitate them in one part, their obedience to an ascertained commission from heaven, we estimate their course aright, we justify the judgment of God, we acknowledge them as our forerunners in the faith, we glean that lesson from their lives which, (we speak it with reverence,) God Himself intended us to glean."

It is quite a different question, why those who were selected for *special* services were not at the same time more thoroughly instructed in God's *general* will. It may be with the communication of a call to a mission, as we may bye and bye argue that it is with inspiration, that, while strength was given to men to enable them to carry out the Divine counsel, to the performance of which they had readily surrendered themselves, nothing that individualized them, as

their tempers, their propensities, their waywardness, was taken away. At any rate, I throw this out as a suggestion, which deserves more attention than it has hitherto received.

The estimate of the acts of the Judges which it has been here attempted to give, so far from leading men into the Antinomian error into which some fanatics fell, when they drew from the lives of these men an excuse for their own worst excesses, is really a safeguard against it. Their argument in effect was, "That all these men, Samson, for instance, or Gideon, were approved of God, approved in every particular, and that *he* pleases God most thoroughly who follows in the footsteps of His saints." How fruitful of unclean living in the holder of such opinions, how utterly calculated to sap the very foundations of morality in weaker brethren such doctrines are, the history of the seventeenth century may prove, alas! too thoroughly. How entirely destitute of reason they seem to be, our previous considerations have shown.

And if, in objection to this view, there are those who in no cavilling spirit but in all honesty exclaim, "But praise you men for earnestness, for faithfulness, for zeal? Those qualities may be exhibited, indeed we have seen them exhibited, and with the worst objects in

view." "Nay; but," we reply, "we praised these men with this limitation, that those qualities were exhibited in the performance of an ascertained will of God, or an accredited mission from heaven." And this limitation is an absolutely necessary one. There is a sort of hero-worship abroad at present, an admiration or deifying of what the world calls earnestness or thoroughness, which totally overlooks, on the one hand, the ascertainment of a Divine mission, and on the other the righteousness of the end towards which such earnestness is directed. It is very liberal in its character, this hero-worship. It will embrace in its vast pantheon Moses, as an earnest legislator, or Samson, as an earnest patriot, or Plato, as a high-toned moralist, or Alexander, as a determined conqueror, or Mahomet, as a ruthless propagandist, or Cromwell, as an unscrupulous leveller of the ranks and distinctions of society, or Montaigne, as a decided sceptic, or Napoleon, as a fearless and avowed man of the world. It will not pause to examine their credentials or weigh the lawfulness of their ends. You will recognize the doctrines to which we allude, and their chief assertors. The later hallucinations of Comtism are one development of it, and there are others. But if you have at all followed the

course of these remarks, you will allow that such are not the qualities for which the Judges obtained a good report, or for which the persons in question can be accepted at the great scrutiny of men's deeds."

And now, to conclude our argument, let the following remarks be made. The Christian sympathises with the doubter, and, indeed, hails him as a dear brother, so far as his jealousy for the due exercise of the moral sense is concerned, and so far also as, in common with himself, he feels anxiety that no act should be found in a man's hand which may contradict the promptings of the moral sense. He agrees with him that it were a very inadequate and unworthy notion of the Deity to suppose Him capable of commending particular acts which the moral sense must disapprove. He would, with him, hesitate about accepting the Bible, did it, when duly examined, at all sanction such a view. He repudiates utterly the perverse method of judging of Scripture characters which would make the Deity the prompter or the approver of unrighteousness. And he goes on to exhibit a more excellent way of reading the Bible. He rejects such special pleading as would take for granted that Scripture characters must be justified in all their acts, and by what-

ever violent suppositions. He has a larger conception of God's government, and of God's judgment. He supposes Him to be capable of distinguishing between the general carrying out of an ascertained mission through a life, and occasional deviations from goodness, through human frailty, or want of discernment induced by defective education, or by the temper of the times in which a man lives. These views of God, and of the Bible, and of the characters which appear on its pages, will, it is his hope and prayer, direct the honest unbeliever to belief, and clear away his doubts. For every reason, such doubts should be cleared away, but for this reason most especially. So long as they exist, they must range him, unjustly indeed but still popularly, with those who "hate the light, and come not to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved;" or with the Brahmin, who destroyed a microscope which showed living animalcula upon his vegetable food, because it dispelled his persuasion that none could possibly be found there.[1]

[1] Riddle, Bampton Lectures.

LECTURE III.

2 Peter ii. 4, 6—9.

God turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations.

You will remember that in my Second Lecture I discussed the difficulties which some persons have found, in the fact that many of the men who are praised in the Bible for their faith in carrying out special missions, were defective in parts of their character. I showed how these defects might be accounted for, and, indeed, that they might, under the circumstances, have been expected to exist. And I showed further that, in spite of them, God might, without at all commending those defects, propose the earnestness with which the men carried out their missions to our imitation. My conclusions

were these. We are not debarred from exercise of our moral sense on the particular acts of these men. And so far as any objection to the Bible, founded on their particular acts, is concerned, the God of the Bible is no other in His estimate of them than the God of Nature. A man may be a Christian, that is, an embracer of Revealed Religion, without ceasing to be a Theist, that is, a man worshipping the God of whom he is informed by Natural Religion. In other words, a man need not become a mere Theist, on the plea that by superadding belief in the Bible to the Creed of Nature he is compelled to do violence to his views of right and wrong.

The men of whom I spoke were those who had a special mission, and, as has been said, God commended them for carrying out that special mission. Supposing, however, that the praise bestowed upon *them* in the Bible can be accounted for, what, an objector may still urge, am I to think of the praise bestowed upon certain other persons, who had no special mission. These seem to be men, more or less like myself, men who had ordinary duties to perform, and therefore men of whose career, the miraculous parts of it being set aside, an estimate should be formed in the ordinary way.

Several of them seem to me to be far from perfect; their lives are disfigured by weaknesses, and even by, what would be called in other cases, gross and striking sins. Am I to shut my eyes to these facts? And, if so, on what principle am I to do so? Is it because God has stamped the men with His general approval? What, then, am I to think of God? of His discernment between good and evil things, and between good and evil men? Or am I to suppose that in these cases right and wrong do not exist? Why should they then exist in my own case? My moral sense is so offended by these difficulties offered by the Bible, that I fear I must take refuge in unbelief of its asserted origin, and refuse to refer it to the God of whom I am taught from within.

So speaks our objector: and the cases to which he usually refers, or at least refers as types of a class, are those of Noah and Lot, who are mentioned by St. Peter, the latter of them in our text, the former in the verses immediately preceding it. Of Noah, he observes, "He is called in the New Testament 'a preacher of righteousness;' in the Old Testament it is said of him, that 'he was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God;'

that God 'remembered Noah,' and saved him when the rest of mankind was destroyed: and the like. Yet of this man is recorded in the 9th Chapter of Genesis, a distressing story of ignominious weakness, and of fretful and impotent resentment ensuing upon it. The man who walked with God is overtaken with drunkenness; the man who 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord,' has no mercy on his erring child: and as for preaching righteousness to others, I look for righteousness in his own case, and behold a cry! (Is. v. 7.) What am I to think of God who commends the career of such a man? Are not his particular acts, which my moral sense disapproves, necessarily commended at the same time?"

It is easy, I reply, to meet the difficulties connected with the case of Noah. Even those who are most inclined to cavil at the lives of Scriptural personages have nothing to urge against him so far as the greater part of his life is concerned. He recommended the religion he professed by his faith, and by the ventures that he made for it; by his perseverance in good amid an evil world; by his acts; and, as St. Peter tells us, by his words also. Nay, even had the Apostle's record of his preaching, as that term is usually understood, never been written, or,

having been written, had it perished, his acts and general life would of themselves have found a voice which could scarcely have failed to pierce our ears, and make its way to our consciences. Thus far he may safely be presented to our imitation—not, indeed, as absolutely perfect, (though no flaws are hitherto discoverable in his conduct, as exhibited in the sacred record,) but as contrasted with his contemporaries; and by the merciful consideration of God, who regards the struggles which he, in common with other men, had with evil within. And as for the transaction to which the objector alludes, distressing as it is to read, it is not to be interpreted harshly. Stated at its very worst, what is it but an instance of a man, generally careful of himself, being overtaken, first in a fault of drunkenness, and secondly, possibly through anger with himself, in a fault of petulance towards others? Even if this was so, need we suppose that he did not repent of his faults, and that God did not pardon and cancel them, because of the remembrance of his lifelong struggle to keep himself pure? It is not, however, necessarily—indeed it is not fairly—to be stated thus. No wonder that the first planter of a vineyard, unused to the effects of his invention, wine, should have been overcome by wine.

Whatever he did, then, in the way of excess he did ignorantly. And, if his sentence upon his irreverent and scoffing son appears to be severe as compared with the offence, that parallel passage in the Book of Proverbs (xxx. 17) must be remembered:—"The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." And other words to a similar effect are found in the Book of Leviticus (xx. 9). In fact, Noah was merely enforcing that principle of honour and of obedience to parents which is part of the law of nature imprinted on man's heart, which was prior in existence both to any external enactment and to any formal declaration on God's part of displeasure at its contravention. Noah spoke as a patriarch and king: in the former capacity interpreting God's law to his offspring; in the latter authoritatively presiding over its administration. And he spoke, also, as a prophet in both senses of the term: he explained God's law as an instructor, and, as an inspired seer, he foretold those consequences of its infringement which should affect even remote generations.

I conceive, then, that without derogating from God's supreme attribute of discernment of the character of His creatures, Noah may be called

righteous, and even generally, if not in every act of his life, be proposed to our imitation. Depict him as unfavourably as we will, he is superior to the vast majority of mankind. As Hezekiah and Josiah, long afterwards, the latter of whom died in an act of presumption, his general course is mercifully regarded by the Almighty, and is commended to our imitation; his particular acts are left to be judged of by our moral sense.

"The case of Lot, however," says the objector, "presents me with greater difficulties. He, like Noah, is a person in ordinary life, and for that ordinary life he is twice called in the Text *just* or *righteous*—the words are the same in the original. Yet what does he appear from the pages of the Old Testament to have been? A man who estranged himself from Abraham, his guardian in youth, in manhood his redeemer from captivity: a man who fixed his permanent abode in society which he knew to be evil, and with the sights and words of which, according to the Text, he vexed his righteous soul daily: a man whose virtues, whatever they were, did not "go forth of him," or leaven even his own family: a man who, after his great deliverance, though one of the cities of the Plain had been spared at his intercession, was faithless enough

to distrust God's protection there, and to flee to a mountain cave, where his latter days were defiled with hideous sin! If I try to believe this man to be just or righteous, if I conceive him worthy to have been an entertainer of angels, or an object of special interposition on the part of God, I do violence to my moral sense, and to Him who, I believe, implanted that faculty in my soul."

Well, for the benefit of such an objector, whom I suppose to make such remarks in no cavilling spirit, but because he has been misled, and, indeed, for the benefit of all to whom similar difficulties may have occurred, I next propose to examine in some detail the life and character of Lot. I will first exhibit them, as well as I can, by weaving into a continuous narrative what is said of them in the Bible. My second point will be to show how the epithets bestowed upon him in the Text are to be understood, consistently with our ideas of the moral attributes of the Almighty. And it will follow, to examine, whether certain wise and benevolent ends may not be discovered as probably designed by God in the transmission of Lot's biography to our day, and in the bestowal of such epithets upon him.

And first let me sketch Lot's career. I shall

"nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice," in spreading it before you.

We hear of him first in Ur of the Chaldees, that remote eastern settlement where Terah dwelt with his three sons, Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. The last-mentioned of these, the father of Lot, died early. Thus left an orphan, Lot accompanied his grandfather Terah and part of his family on God's first summons to Abraham, to Haran or Charran in Mesopotamia. There Terah died. Nahor seems to have gone thither afterwards, and to have remained there. Lot followed the fortunes of Abraham, to whom God had repeated His call to travel westward and southward; with him he crossed the "Great River," and eventually arrived in Canaan. The blessings which attended Abraham's obedience extended to his nephew and companion. If "Abraham was very rich in cattle and silver and gold," "Lot also, which was with Abraham, had flocks and herds and tents." The two men were together as they sought encampment after encampment, the weaker mind, for such it afterwards proved to be, the mind of Lot, guided by that of Abraham, and the faith of the weaker upheld by the faith of the stronger.

At length, while they were between Bethel

(afterwards to be celebrated as the scene of Jacob's vision,) and Hai, a difference arose between them. The pasturage was too scanty for the flocks and herds of both, encompassed as they were by the earlier possessors of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. They had now become two great chieftains, and their herdsmen began to have feuds. How far Lot was to blame for this does not appear. But Abraham is mild and conciliatory. Though they may not dwell together in unity, they may at least part amicably. He allows his companion to choose in what direction he will remove. Lot shows no signs of similar consideration, or indeed of any thought at all, except how he may advantage himself. Eastward of their present encampment lay the vale of the lower Jordan, with its well-watered plains, beautiful "as the garden of the Lord," says the sacred historian. It was a tempting spot. True, Sodom and its neighbouring cities, of which the report even then was, that the men of them were "wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly," were there. But what mattered this to a man, who, though his soul was too much in his wealth, no doubt felt himself secure in his integrity? Perhaps his feeling was, One must not be too scrupulous. So Lot pitched his tent towards

Sodom, and soon, as it would appear, went and dwelt in that "great, dim, wicked city" itself.

Some time afterward, how long we know not, a descent is made on Jordan by the chiefs of some clans from the Euphrates. The chiefs of the cities of the Plain resist them in vain, their people and possessions are carried into captivity, and "Lot and his goods, and the women also, and the people" of his clan are captured with them. The ready valour of Abraham and his retainers and allies rescues his kinsman. We look in vain now for Lot's separation of himself from contact with the wicked. This had been a grand opportunity of rejoining his uncle and great benefactor, the dignity of whose character, blessed as he was by the hands of that mysterious and awe-invested personage, Melchizedek, was revealed in strong contrast to that of the sensual inhabitants of Sodom. But Lot remains in Sodom still—personally upright, no doubt, and not delighting in, but vexing himself with, the filthy conversation of the wicked. He remains, he even espouses his daughters to men of that very community, from which, had his faith been stronger, and his imitation of Abraham more perfect, he would have severed himself with abhorrence.

With all this, however, he keeps himself per-

sonally pure. He has faith, but it is a faith, paradoxically enough, both weak and fool-hardy. It is weak, because he values the things of sight and the advantages of this present world above higher considerations. It is fool-hardy, because he exposes himself and his family to contamination. At length the hour arrives when vengeance is to fall upon Sodom. Lot, imperfect as he is, God regards and saves. His dwelling is visited by angels; he himself and his two daughters are wonderfully led out and preserved from the general overthrow; and one of the cities of the Plain is spared at his entreaty. "The Lord is merciful to him." His criminal offer to preserve his guests by the dishonour of his children is superseded by a miracle. Though he cannot prevail with his sons-in-law, whom he ought to have been able to influence for good; though his wife proves disobedient, and perishes in the very road to safety; though he himself distrusts God's protection in Zoar, and inconsistently flees to the mountain which he at first professed to be unable to reach; though he is there betrayed into acts, which, unless we charitably suppose age to have dulled and even destroyed his moral perceptions, were acts of grievous sin:— he is still preserved, and his name, after all

these failures, and in spite of them, is recorded by St. Peter, with the appellation of *righteous*, and a moral is deduced from his story, combined with that of Noah, that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the *godly* out of temptations."

Such is the biography of Lot. But how, we now ask, secondly, are the epithets, *righteous* and *godly*, and the like, as applied to such a man, to be justified consistently with our views of the moral attributes of the Almighty?

There is, of course, no conceivable casuistry by which such a man can be argued to be perfect. This must at once be granted. Whatever Lot was, he was not saved for his own righteousness. It is expressly said, that he was saved for Abraham's sake. "It came to pass when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt." His righteousness, too, whatever it was, was purely personal; he was not, as Noah was, "a preacher of righteousness," he did not attempt to diffuse it. Still he is called righteous, he is numbered amongst the godly. How is this? The puzzle remains. Does God approve of imperfection?

The answer is ready. God does not approve

of imperfection, but He is very pitiful and of tender mercy, and, if there be still hopes of a man and faith in a man, does not cast him off. "The Lord being merciful to him," is a phrase which occurs in the midst of the narrative, and is a key to all its difficulties. Lot had undoubtedly sinned in parting from Abraham, in throwing himself into the midst of temptation for greed's sake, in not withdrawing himself and his family from it, when the captivity of the cities in which he dwelt was a warning like the first drops of rain, of the storm impending upon them. He had undoubtedly sinned in rejoicing at the renewed prosperity, during which the garden-like vale of Jordan recovered its beauty. And he undoubtedly sinned up to the very moment of his quitting Zoar, in the other matters which have been noticed. Still he was personally pure, and stood forth eminent amid the wrecks of humanity around him, like some one fair column, shattered indeed but yet left erect, in an ancient temple, when all its fellows are in ruins. Thus he was a great contrast to the miserable transgressors with whom he lived. And, as he was so far righteous, He who can discern faith in a man, be it small as a grain of mustard seed, He who afterwards

prevented St. Peter, (who wrote of Lot,) from falling away, saved Lot from Sodom, and saved him from himself and his indiscretion—saved him, because, though he had thrown himself into temptation, and had not courage to flee from it, he struggled personally against it, and to a certain extent prevailed in the struggle.

The result is, not that we suppose God to be unable to discriminate between the good and evil of a man's life, or carelessly to stamp all the acts of a man with approval. It is rather this—God, for our encouragement, if perchance we have committed errors which seem irretrievable, bids us struggle on, bids us hope for a place, though it be the lowest place, among the saints,—a place, though it be the lowest place, among those who, great as their defects have been, shall at the last be called *the righteous*, and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Lot was saved, but it was through great sorrow; his wealth, for increasing which he had dwelt in Sodom; his sons-in-law, whom he had chosen probably with worldly motives; his wife, his home, were all taken from him. He escaped "for his life," and as has been well said, "with his life only;" his "life given him for a prey," all else lost; "saved as by fire," as "a brand plucked from

the burning;" scarce saved, as the Apostle says, apparently with an allusion to him, "if the righteous scarcely be saved."

The terms then, *righteous* or *just*, and *godly*, are obviously used in the Text, and in various other parts of Scripture, not positively but comparatively. Our moral sense is to guide us into the discernment of the diversities of their use, and is to be informed by careful study and consideration of the circumstances under which such diversities occur. In the present case they appear to have been sanctioned by our great and merciful Father, in reference not to those particular acts of Lot's life which indicate irresolution and even sin, but to the general issue of his struggles with temptation.

We cannot imagine that even Theism would eliminate from the character of the Deity, condescension to infirmity, encouragement to the weak, gentle leading towards recovery, comparative commendation to those who are struggling to recover themselves or at least not to fall lower. The moral sense of the Theist would not be offended at these; and we may, therefore, fairly ask our objector, why should it stumble if they are found in the God of Revelation? Let a large and liberal view be taken of Lot's career, and the moral sense, so far from being

offended at the divinely recorded expressions concerning it, will discover that wise and benevolent ends were probably designed by God, in sanctioning and causing to be recorded their employment.

This was the third point to which I proposed to direct your attention ; and I do so especially because it gives me an opportunity of showing how the moral sense may be reverently exercised upon the men spoken of in the Bible.

The primal error of Lot was his throwing himself into temptation. This he did, not merely by the act of quitting Abraham, and so depriving himself of his guidance, though perhaps he was foolish in this, for some expedient might have been found, by which their interests could have been reconciled. He did something more. The men of Sodom were already noted for their wickedness. Now the whole policy of God in reference to His chosen race had been to separate them even from their kin, who, if not profligate in their lives, were, at least, idolaters in their creed. Lot chose to ignore this policy, though he could scarcely have been ignorant of it. The vale of Jordan was alluring to the sight and imagination, and seemed to promise many advantages. So, sight and imagination prevailed over faith. So,

the love of mammon counteracted the implied command of God. So, the long wanderings which Lot had encountered, in deference to that command, since the day when, with Abraham, he struck his tent in Ur of the Chaldees, and began to journey to the south-west, were rendered of no avail to him. "I shall not surely be corrupted," was probably his feeling as his eye roamed over the landscape watered by a stream, if not as copious, yet as beneficent proportionably in its overflowings, as the Egyptian Nile which he had recently visited. "Perhaps I may even reclaim these men to God." Strange that the tradition of Eve's temptation, and her yielding to it, did not occur to his mind. It might have afforded a useful parallel in its commencement, a useful moral in its termination—"Ye shall not surely die," said the serpent, "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat." Sight and imagination had prevailed over faith with Eve. "Am I not," Lot might have

said to himself, "succumbing to a similar temptation?" But this he did not say. Our moral sense is invited by the record to observe the folly and the danger of neglecting a known obligation, either with a view to prospective personal advantage, or with a delusive hope that though we may imperil ourselves we may possibly benefit others.

It must have been no long time, (especially if Lot moved almost immediately into Sodom itself,) before he discovered the irreclaimably dissolute character of the society which he had rashly entered. What then should have been his best action? Clearly to leave that pleasant spot, rather than to remain in the tents of ungodliness. Clearly to flee from the temptation, which he was not only not bound, but had been virtually forbidden to encounter. But this he did not do. Self-interest, (I use this term in its lowest sense,) perhaps false shame lest he should appear to have changed his mind, or, at any rate, irresolution, such as he displayed afterwards, when the angels were pressing him, prevailed, and he abided there. So he chose for himself a life of vexation and harass, he rendered the days of his pilgrimage, difficult to man at all times, tenfold more difficult through his presumption. Had he fallen, who would

have been to blame but himself? And who shall describe the ebbings and flowings of his spirit, as he trembled daily lest he should fall? So again our moral sense is invited by the record to observe that after we have committed a false step, the truest wisdom is, as far, and as speedily, as we can, to retrace it.

Lot was preserved after all. He was so—but why? Because God was more careful of him than he had been of himself, more merciful than he deserved. But even here you will notice, (I say to the objector,) God's discriminating treatment. Though He forgave Lot's sin, and delivered him from the remote and after-life consequences of it, He did not deliver him from its temporal penalties. His property was ruined, his home was broken up, his wife was taken from him, his sons-in-law mocked his warnings, and perished in the flames; his daughters proved dissolute, and betrayed him into what, had he not been in his dotage, had been a grievous sin, and was, at any rate, a grievous scandal. That he was in his dotage, we must charitably believe; otherwise, he could not, as Noah was, have been ignorant of the besotting influence of wine, who had long been acquainted with the "vine of Sodom," and the produce of "the fields of Gomorrah" (Deut.

xxxii. 32). And who shall imagine the horrors of that morning when he quitted the devoted city, or the sinking of heart and distrust which made him quit even Zoar and flee to the mountain? As in the case of David, though God put away his sin, and delivered him from immediate death, and from "the second death," He took away his son from him, and afflicted him in his kingdom and family, so it was here. Lot was punished in this world, even though he is of those who are to be saved in "the day of the Lord." So our moral sense may again observe, that God shows that He can and does appreciate degrees of righteousness, (for that word is of large application,) and that the lower degrees of it are only imitable in their result, not in their progress, not in the close approach which they make to failure, not in the sufferings by which their deflections are chastened. And, (I say to the objector,) this will admit yet a further illustration. Both Abraham and Lot are called righteous, but mark the difference between their conditions. "Fear not, Abraham," is the language of God to one, "for I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." The land which he did not covet, which he did not endanger his salvation for, and a vast extension of it, are promised to his

posterity. He is the friend of God, because he endeavours to walk before Him and be perfect. (Not, indeed, that even Abraham was perfect. Twice he forgot his confidence in God, and betook himself to a policy of deceit. And his polygamy is not to be defended. It was probably a passing choice of his own way of accomplishing God's promise that he should have an heir, and so was a weakness in faith. It was certainly a contravention of the original law of marriage. These actions are left to be judged of by our moral sense. Objectionable, however, as they may be, they are something very different from dwelling half a lifetime in the haunts of iniquity.) But to Lot, God says, "Escape for thy life; flee to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." The bright pastures, the commercial wealth, which he sought at the peril of his soul, and which he continued to seek, though to the vexation of his soul—where are they? The pastures dissolved into a stagnant and noisome lake, the wealth swallowed up in its depths. Though they are both called righteous and are both saved, shall any one who interprets the applicability of the epithets by their respective biographies, and traces the hand of God in moulding the events which formed their biographies, be scandalized or argue that

they were equally pleasing in God's sight, or will be equally rewarded hereafter? They must receive according to their works; the one a greater, the other a lesser glory, for he was just saved, but nearly lost. An enlightened moral sense will take into its review the whole of God's dealings with a man, will interpret the words which He permits to be employed concerning him, by His providence respecting him. And as for imitating Lot to the letter because he is called righteous, or because he eventually escaped through God's great mercy, it will say thus of him: to do so were to be like the silly moth which, though she be not destroyed, is often singed and injured by the flame near which she heedlessly plays.

LECTURE IV.

GENESIS xxii. 1, 2.

> And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of.

I SPOKE to you in my Third Lecture, of the difficulty which some experience at the occasional employment of the attribute *righteous* in the Bible. They have found it applied therein, and, it would seem, with the sanction of Him who inspired the writers, to men some of whose particular actions do not approve themselves to the moral sense. And these men are not persons who, like the Judges and David, have been raised up for special purposes, but persons whose portion is cast in the ordinary walks of life, and who, setting aside the miraculous circumstances of their career, are to be estimated in the ordinary way.

My solutions of the difficulty were these :—

I. We do not find any particular acts which jar upon our hearts as immoral, commended. Such acts are either simply recorded and left to be judged of by us as similar acts in other histories, or they are, in one way or another, condemned. And the condemnation is either conveyed in so many words, or by a retribution in this life, the connection of which with the acts it is not hard to discover. Sometimes also, both these methods of condemnation occur.

II. If, on the whole, the men of whom we were treating are termed *just* or *righteous*, or *godly*, these epithets are bestowed upon them,

1st. Comparatively, *i.e.* because they stand out in striking contrast to the evil world around them.

2ndly. By merciful consideration of the fact that they did, though with many failures and through much weakness, persevere to the end, and keep themselves, in the main, true to their allegiance to God.

The result was that, though we may believe that they are to obtain a place with *the righteous* at the Great Day, and to receive the commendation due to their general course, "Servants of God, well done," there are certain things which we are not to suppose. We are not to suppose

that the Almighty will apportion an equal reward to all who are either designated righteous in His Book on earth, or registered as righteous in the records above. And we are not to suppose any particular wrong acts which they have committed to be stamped with the Divine commendation. To admit either of these suppositions would, not unreasonably, incline us to distrust Revealed Religion and to take refuge in Natural Religion, because the moral sense which God has implanted in our souls would be contradicted. So, that moral sense is not to be contradicted, nor are its intimations to be silenced, as some persons have, honestly indeed, but mistakenly, imagined, through reverence for the manner in which men like Lot, of many imperfections, are spoken of in the Bible. God never commends an act in a man's life which is repugnant to our moral sense, though He may commend a man for having struggled on to the end of his life, in spite of many backslidings, to a good termination of it.

But, we may still hear our objector say, "though I might be satisfied, after what has been adduced, that God does not commend acts repugnant to the moral sense, I find a difficulty in the Bible, connected with the moral sense, which is even of a graver nature. I vehemently

wish to believe of God that He is altogether just and true, that no one command of His will contradict any other command. Accordingly, I wish to believe that, if He has given a positive injunction from without, He will not, by an inspiration within, desire a man to transgress it, and afterwards punish him for such transgression. I wish to believe that He will not specially empower a man to execute a certain mission, and then be displeased at him for the manner in which he carries it out, and punish him, either in himself, or in the persons of his descendants. I wish to believe, finally, that He will not issue any command from without, compliance with, and execution of, which, will contradict what Christians consider to be, and what I concede may be fairly called, His voice speaking within."

So pleads, and not uncandidly, our objector—and I think that his willingness to admit so much as he does admit, is a grand reason why we should endeavour to explain any cases in the Bible which to him, and, at first sight, perhaps, even to some of ourselves, appear to militate against what he would fain believe but cannot. Of these cases there are three of some pre-eminence. There are more, but the treatment applied to these three may serve as a

specimen of the treatment of others similar or analogous to them. You will observe that I am not now directly speaking of cases in which God has commanded men to act judicially, without afterwards expressing disapproval, or administering punishment for the manner in which they have carried out His command, as in the instance of constituting the Israelites ministers of his vengeance upon Canaan. There may be, and indeed are, great difficulties connected with such cases, some of which were mentioned in my Second Lecture. Others are the entanglement of the guiltless with the guilty, or of descendants in the punishment due to the sins of their ancestors. But the consideration of these incidental points belongs to another part of my subject, and may be passed by till I come to the Sixth Lecture. I am now speaking of cases in which God acts, or appears to act, upon the conscience of the individual man, in reference to his personal career.

Well, this is the first case alleged by our objector. God, he says, must be supposed to have forbidden the kings of Israel to number the people, for David acted wrongly in doing so, and was punished for doing so. And the sinfulness of the procedure was so thoroughly ac-

knowledged that Joab, ordinarily unscrupulous enough, remonstrated with David on his announcing his intention. Yet what do we find in 2 Samuel xxiv. 1? "The Lord moved David to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." Here is an inspiration within contradicting a command without; and here is a punishment ensuing upon obedience to such an inspiration. How can this be, if we hold that the Almighty can neither contradict Himself, nor be so unjust as to punish an act which He has enjoined?

The answer, I reply, is easy. On examining the parallel record of the transaction, which occurs in the 1st Book of Chronicles xxi. 1: we find that it was not the Lord, but "Satan" who "stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." And the passage in the 2nd Book of Samuel, when stated in full, and correctly expounded according to the Hebrew idiom, is this: "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and David was moved against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." The people deserved punishment for some sin, probably overweening exultation at prosperity, which they had committed. David, their king, had partaken in it, at least to the extent of not checking it, and,

for the time, in the way that heathenism would have described as *Nemesis*, God left him to himself and its effect. Satan took advantage of this. David was moved by Satan to yet further vanity and presumption. And for these faults and for this implicit negligence, he and his people were punished together. It is quite a gratuitous assumption that there was any special command against numbering the people. No such command is found in the Law. So far, then, as this occurrence is concerned, God did not do what the objector supposes Him to have done, contradict an external command given by Him, by an inspiration in David's soul. The utmost that can be said is this. Here is one of those instances in which, when men have sinned, God commits their chastisement to human adversaries without, or leaves them to the agency of an adversary within, who leads them on to circumstances of further transgression. Then God interferes and punishes.

The second case alleged by our objector is this. God, as is well known, commanded and empowered Jehu to extirpate the house of Ahab. A portion of the command was expressed in the remarkable words, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel." The command was

carried out to the very uttermost; and Jehu, one would have been inclined to suppose, was entitled to praise and reward for the skill and daring with which he performed it. Yet I find in Hosea i. 4, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." Now, how can I interpret this, except on the supposition that God, contrary to what I should have expected of His justice, disapproved of, and punished, the acts which His own command had caused to be perpetrated?

Again, an answer is ready: Jehu, like other evil men, was a sword in the hand of God to punish offenders. Sometimes, as in Jehu's case, evil men are consciously God's swords; sometimes unconsciously. He was commanded to accomplish a certain revolution. He carried out the command, and for doing so received a certain reward—the kingdom for himself and his descendants to the fourth generation. But, at the same time, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, in many respects; in the very performance of the command, he did much that was gratuitously cruel; in fact, he was throughout rather fulfilling the ambitious and fierce instincts of his own soul, than acting as under God's guidance. Therefore, a limitation was

fixed to the royalty of his descendants. They were to be kings *only* to the fourth generation. And the passage in Hosea both repeats that limitation, and exhibits the carrying out of a higher law, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The slaughters which Jehu had committed were to be regarded, because of the spirit in which he had committed them, rather as acts of his own ferocious temper, than as acts done in the execution of the displeasure of God. And when this is fully understood, much of the difficulty which we have supposed disappears. Whatever remains, this at least is clear: the particular objection, that the vengeance on Jehu's performances impugns God's justice, and offends the moral sense, falls to the ground.

I now approach the third case, which is drawn by our objector from my immediate Text:— "God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of."

Now, observes our objector, I cannot help putting the case of Abraham thus. He is a man

whose moral sense was obviously singularly pure; a man above his age, and imbued with most reverent notions of the holiness and justice of God. Abhorrence of shedding human blood, and certainly of shedding it unnecessarily and unjustly, must therefore have been a fundamental article of his creed. He had learned this from within, and no doubt his internal convictions upon the subject had been strengthened by a tradition of that external command to Noah which confirmed it. It was even so strong within him that he had found a difficulty in reconciling it with the judicial destruction of the sinful cities of the Plain. And the point which had then specially weighed with him was the possibility that innocent persons and guilty persons might be consumed in one common ruin. Most modestly and submissively, indeed, he gave utterance to this difficulty:— "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And he would seem to have been at length satisfied, both as to the justice and as to the mercy of God, by the assurance that Sodom should not be destroyed if ten righteous were found therein, and by the preservation of righteous Lot when that condition was not fulfilled. But then there came an injunction to him to take away life, to take away innocent

life, to take it away with his own hands, and to devote the person slain as a burnt sacrifice, in the way in which, certainly afterwards and probably even then, the people of Syria were accustomed to propitiate their false divinities. Nay, more, that no circumstance of horror might be wanting, the person to be slain was his son, his only legitimate son, the son long expected, the son granted to him against the ordinary hopes of nature, the son of his old age, the son on whom the prospects of his house exclusively depended. What could Abraham have thought of the God who issued such a command? And, granting for the moment that *his* faith was satisfied, what am *I* to think of the God who issued it? He is very unlike the just God whom my internal constitution disposes me to acknowledge; and, if so, how can I receive that document which thus sets forth His character as a document emanating from Him? I can comprehend that, if Isaac had been snatched away from his father by disease or any common casualty, Abraham might have acquiesced with more or less of resignation. Submission under calamity is a duty appreciated by the moral sense. But action in obedience to such a command as is enunciated in the Text, what is it but such a contradiction

to the moral sense as no possible casuistry can reconcile ?

Well, I reply, the case has difficulties, but they are by no means insurmountable. Let me endeavour to meet them as best I can.

But the way must first be cleared.

There are two popular expedients for solving our problem. These I cannot adopt. I deem them evasive, and mention them only to repudiate them.

The former of them cuts the knot rather than unravels it. It asserts that the command was not opposed to *Abraham's* moral sense ; that he had been long accustomed to see human sacrifices offered by his neighbours; and that his familiarity with the practice might have, and most probably had, modified his idea of its sinfulness, and even induced him to imagine that it was acceptable to the Almighty. Of course if this was so, the external command which we are discussing, addressed as it was to a heart already disciplined for years in the way of submission, would have fallen upon a congenial soil. It would merely have summoned Abraham to give up an object of his affection—by an act of his own indeed, but not by an act in contravention to his principles. His trial, therefore, would have been in kind, though not in degree,

perhaps, like surrendering successively his homes in Ur of the Chaldees and in Haran for reasons which he could not thoroughly understand.

There is an element of truth, I may admit, in this view, and I shall avail myself of it hereafter, but it contains something that is unproved, and something that is unsound.

There is no evidence whatever that human sacrifices did exist in Abraham's day. The nations among which they afterwards prevailed were the Moabites and Ammonites. But the ancestors of these two nations, Moab and Ben-ammi, the children of Lot, were only just born, if indeed they were born, when the temptation of Abraham occurred. It is impossible, therefore, to support the theory of the lowering of Abraham's moral sense, in this respect, on the ground of his familiarity with such sacrifices.

But even had such sacrifices occurred daily before Abraham's eyes, we may not conceive of God that, in any command addressed by Him to man, a lower standard is adopted than that which He has Himself ordained. In a human orator, perhaps, whatever we think of the morality of the proceeding, it may be a piece of worldly wisdom, to take advantage of the low tone of his audience. And we may imagine an audience of low tone, neither vexed nor scan-

dalized at his proposals. But as we have no reason to imagine the moral sense of Abraham to have been so lowered that he could have deemed human sacrifices lawful, so, even if it had been, we cannot conceive that God would have addressed to him a command based upon such a level of belief.

I next approach the second of the two methods which I have ventured to term evasions of the difficulties. It expresses itself thus. A thought came into the mind of Abraham, not suggested by an external voice, but occurring as men speak, fortuitously, that God, who had been pleased with his previous acts of giving up what was dear to him, would be pleased with the sacrifice of his son. This thought, which, it is again assumed, was not out of keeping with the practice of his period, he forthwith proceeded to carry out. Accordingly, with a superstition, which even then, perhaps, as afterwards, designated especial hills as places acceptable to divinities, he sought a mountain in the land of Moriah for the purpose. After he had arrived there, a second thought convinced him that his design was a mistaken one, and he offered up a ram, which he saw entangled in a thicket, in the place of his child. Now upon this it is obvious to remark, in addition to what was said

under the former head, that, however ingenious it may be, it is not what the Book of Genesis informs us of. It eliminates the utterances of God, twice mentioned in the narrative, from the transaction. It does away with any temptation or trial on the divine side, and with any faithful endurance of trial on the human side. It represents Abraham's conduct, not as an act of enjoined self-devotion, but as a fanciful mistake in the first instance, and a mere retrieval of a mistake in the second. And as for any of those disciplinary lessons to Abraham at the time, and any of those typical intimations relating to the far future, and to the Better Sacrifice, which are usually associated with the story, these absolutely and entirely disappear under such a manipulation of the sacred record.

But let me now endeavour to point out a truer method by which the result may be attained which I have supposed our objector to desiderate, viz. a reconcilement of the command of God to Abraham with such an apprehension of the righteousness of the Deity as approves itself to the moral sense.

In doing this I must postulate:

1st. That the transaction must be read in connection with the rest of Abraham's life, not regarded as an isolated occurrence.

2ndly. That the whole transaction, the positive and the negative portions of it, the command and the counter-command, as they appear to be, the intention of Abraham to sacrifice his son, and his eventual substitution of an inferior offering, must be brought under our view at once. Otherwise its true aspect cannot be adequately understood.

First, the transaction must be read in connection with the rest of Abraham's life, not regarded as an isolated occurrence in it.

The whole career of Abraham exhibits him as a man under a course of temptation or trial, by the proposal to him of acts the immediate intention or bearing of which he could not comprehend. And if, as was occasionally the case, he was informed what their final results were to be, no further intimation was given to him as to the agency by which they were to be brought about, except that it was to be through the guiding or at least the over-ruling Providence of the Almighty. It must have been to him a sore perplexity why he was summoned originally to quit Ur of the Chaldees, the ancestral seat of his race, and to journey towards a land of which he had before, perhaps, scarce heard the name. And when he had been permitted to dwell for a time in Haran or Charran,

when he had acquired wealth there, and, if we may believe a tradition, no small reputation as a warrior, it was an additional trial to break up his settlement and move from thence. Was not the place consecrated, as it were, by containing the sepulchre of his father? Was he not already the chief of a considerable clan? And though prospects of his seed becoming a mighty nation on the other side of the "Great River" might even then have been open to him, were not equally bright prospects, supposing him to have seed, unfolded to him where he was already? The western bank of the Euphrates was an unknown region to him. In the first place, was it worth having, and might not the pastures of Mesopotamia be better than all the pastures of Canaan? Then, even if it were worth having, how should his children become possessed of it? At that time he had no children, and even if children should afterwards be born to him, would they not be in a better attitude for conquest as opulent Emirs of Haran, than as a wandering horde of strangers? It was hardly reasonable to suppose that all, or nearly all, of his present dependants would join him in what would appear to them a capricious and uncalled-for emigration. And reduction in the number of

his followers was a strange road to empire. These thoughts, or thoughts resembling them, must have passed through the mind of Abraham. But God had summoned him, and they were resolutely thrust aside. "He took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all the substance they had gathered, and the souls they had gotten, (*i.e.* the slaves that they had bought,) in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

And then there ensued the weary pilgrimage of the patriarch up and down the promised land; his endurance of the painful rite of circumcision; his abandonment of the hopes that he long entertained that Ishmael might be his heir; his belief that he should have another son in his old age, his wife being old also; his acknowledgment, in the midst of victory, of a chief superior to himself in the peaceful priest-king, Melchizedek; his neglect, as we should call it, to secure to himself any aggrandisement after he had defeated the hosts of Chedorlaomer and become virtually the leading power in South-eastern Palestine; his acquiescence in the justice of the punishment of Sodom; his forbearing to acquire any permanent footing in the land which he was encouraged to believe

his posterity should make their own, save one little plot wherein to bury his dead; all these things were elements of his discipline: all these contributed, one after another, to establish in his mind the principle that the Will of God was to be to him a law, to be followed at all hazards, and without murmuring or disputing. There might have been much that was at first —nay, even after all—obscure or unintelligible to him in that Will. He might have been sometimes inclined, for a while, to debate its justice. But, as time went on, his surrender of himself became so complete that he was ready to offer an almost unreasoning acquiescence in it. Accordingly, even should God appear to be commanding him to enter upon a course contradictory to his moral sense, should God appear to be dealing with him rather in cruelty than with justice, and to be leading his steps rather in caprice than with settled plan, he would be enabled to resist these first impressions. I do not assert that he would be enabled to say at once: "This is holy and just and true"—the occasion might be too astounding to admit of this. But he would be prepared to say, "Though this thing seems harder than anything that I have yet experienced, harder to understand, harder to act upon, no doubt this feeling is due

to my own infirmity—no doubt I do at present see but a part of the command. Bye and bye, when I shall see the whole, I shall comprehend it more clearly. Meanwhile I am commanded to act. Act, then, I will, and act at once: the issue I commit to my God."

And this brings us to the second postulate. The whole transaction which we are discussing, the positive and the negative portions of it, the command and the counter-command, as they appear to be, the intention of Abraham to sacrifice his son, and his eventual substitution of an inferior offering, must be brought under our view at once. Otherwise its true aspect cannot be adequately understood.

When Abraham had become disciplined, to the extent, and in the manner, supposed, the climax, as we may call it, of his trial arrived. A command was conveyed to him, of which, had he paused to argue upon it, the morality appeared to be, at the very least, exceedingly questionable. So far as he could judge, it was different, not in degree but in kind, from all external commands which had hitherto reached him. *Those* had merely involved self-abnegation, abstention from things harmless in themselves, and only unlawful because forbidden by a voice of paramount authority.

This appeared to him to enjoin an act wrong in itself—at least it would have appeared to do so, had he paused to reflect upon it. But, as is evident from the narrative, he did not feel justified in pausing to reflect. And, this being so, it follows that his mind must have been possessed, and indeed overpowered, by these three absorbing ideas:

1. There is no doubt that it is the Will of God that I should take action in this particular way.

2. There is no doubt that I do not at this moment see, and that I am not intended at this moment to see, the whole compass of the command which has reached me. Otherwise, a distant, and partially indefinite, place of offering, and a tedious journey in quest of that place, would not have formed parts of it. An immediate sacrifice would have been required.

3. There is no doubt, however, that what I do understand of the command must be performed, and that instantly. I am to set out on my journey, I am to take with me Isaac, my beloved. I am to provide the accessories of burnt-sacrifice, even to the knife, the wood, and the fire. I will tarry the Lord's leisure, and before I argue upon the nature of His command, I will see what His whole command is.

Shall not the Judge of all the earth, who doeth what is right, command what is right also?

"So," as we read in the verse which follows our text, "Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto (or toward) the place of which God had told him."

The result was that Abraham found that he was right in judging nothing before the time—that God did not command him to slay his son—that He had commanded no sacrifice save that of His faithful servant's will. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." The matter, therefore, ended in nothing being imposed upon Abraham which was contradictory to the moral sense. The utmost that can be said in derogation of this is, that for three days God had appeared to have issued an unrighteous command—and, that the very appearance of unrighteousness in God was a trial so severe, that the faith of Abraham must have been great indeed not to fail under it. But his faith was rewarded by an exhibition of the command in

its whole scope and compass, which cleared up every difficulty. And a greater reward awaited him thereafter.

The conclusion then is, that so far as any command given by God to His creatures for their personal action is concerned, we do not find, when the whole command is taken into consideration, that He contradicts His own attributes or that conception of them which their moral sense supplies. At least this is the conclusion to which, so far as the crucial case of Abraham is concerned, we seem to have arrived. And, if there is any similar case in the Bible, which I believe there is not, it may be explained in a similar way. And so, if other cases are found, like cases one and two which are treated of above.

Were it otherwise, or were I convinced that it is otherwise, I should say to him who for this reason hesitates to believe of the Bible that it comes from God, I should hesitate as you do. Your hesitation is not an unnatural one, it is even a praiseworthy one, there is "a soul of goodness" in it. But fairly examine what God appears to command in the Bible. Do not be satisfied with your first impressions even of the commands which seem comparatively easy, much less of those which have some intricacy

or peculiarity. You will at length discover that you cannot reasonably distrust their origination from Him, of whom you demand, through the very instinct of your nature, that He should be Truth, Consistency, and Justice. To sum up the subject of these Three expository Lectures, neither the men whom God commends, nor the acts which God commands, in the Bible, furnish cases which impugn His possession of these attributes. As far as these points are concerned, your moral sense need not be either contradicted or silenced, by belief that the Bible comes from Him whom you reverence as the God of Nature, and so, as the Framer of your own internal constitution.

LECTURE V.

MARK x. 17—22.

And when He was gone forth into the way there came one running and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but one, that is God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these things have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest. Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, take up the cross and follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.

TWELVE centuries after this scene occurred, the text describing it, or at least a text of similar tendency, was being read in public, at Assisi, in the Duchy of Spoleto, in Italy. Among the crowd of listeners was a young man, of fair worldly prospects, of high spirits, of pleasing deportment, of creditable extraction. As he listened, his heart was so impressed by the

divine words, that he was induced to interpret them literally, to renounce his possessions, and to assume vows of poverty. And he became, by his personal example, and by the constitutions which he set forth, the founder of the great Order of Mendicant Friars called after himself, Franciscans. Such was the effect of what he heard upon him whom the Church of Rome has canonized as St. Francis of Assisi. Was it the legitimate and proper effect? If so, are not all of us bound by it in exactly the same manner? If not, in what possible sense are the words of Christ to be accepted?

The ordinary answer is, that the effect upon St. Francis was not a legitimate and proper one, and that it is not necessary to act as he did. But the reason usually given for this answer, besides being opposed to the Christian theory that the Bible is for all time and for all men, seems to be rather a thoughtless and self-indulgent one. It is, that our Lord's advice had reference merely to the circumstances of His day, and of the earlier professors of Christianity. For, though there be some truth in this, the generality of its terms, and the off-hand manner in which it is pronounced, deprive us of much of the instruction suggested by the occurrence, and render useless and inoperative

one of the most graphic and pointed incidents in Christ's biography. We pass over the passage as if *we* had nothing to do with it, as if the early eagerness, the haste, the kneeling attitude of the inquirer, the tenor of his inquiry, and his apparently satisfactory rejoinder to the answer he received, as if all these contrasted with his sorrowful departure, had no warning for *us*. And as if, again, there was no mystery in the fact that *he*, whom the Great Discerner of hearts looked upon and loved, loved as one in some degree simple-hearted and true, one in whom the desire of eternal life was not yet quite choked, should have gone away—should have been heard of no more—except to point the moral, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."

> "To-day he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hopes, to-morrow blossoms,
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
> And then he falls."

The ordinary answer, then, with its reason, being inadequate, the difficulty remains, in what way are these words to be received? They seem, if explained as above, to be explained away. They seem, if admitted in their literal sense, to involve a principle which would subvert the very foundations of society. As

Archbishop Whately puts it, "if all were sellers, there would be no buyers." And it has proved a stumbling-block to many who would fain be believers in Revealed Religion, to find in the documents upon which it depends, apparent precepts which suggest a dilemma so perplexing. And there is another class of precepts found in the Bible, besides precepts or apparent precepts of the character which I have already noticed, which are an equal, and I allow, not an unnatural, cause of hesitation. The two classes may not inconveniently be treated of together.

I propose then to discuss to-day the case of those who find in the Bible impediments to belief, which may be stated in the following way:—

The pages of the Bible, according to the Christian theory, are for all time and for all men. Yet we find in them—

1st. Precepts which are either indifferent in themselves, or if not indifferent at the time of their utterance, obsolete, and inapplicable to the present time.

2nd. Precepts which are applicable to no time, which are utterly Utopian, and which, if carried literally into effect, would render it absolutely impossible for society to go on.

In other words, these persons desiderate, almost in the words of a great writer,[1] "an elastic and perpetual applicability of Scripture to all the just demands of man, the creature (hypothetically) made subject to its jurisdiction for ever."

I grant that they are warranted, or not unwarranted, in this desire, and, putting myself in their place, I concede that, if it is not satisfied, they have, so far forth, some reason for not accepting the documents which Christianity presents for their acceptance.

I will give in succession a few instances of the two classes. Those of the first class shall be these. "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day." "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." "Abstain from things offered to idols." Of these it is said, respectively, and under a reservation, I grant said truly: "the first is a political precept, the second an economical precept, belonging to the Hebrew commonwealth; the third, though indeed issued under Christianity by an Apostolical Council, and sanctioned by St. Paul, was merely for a temporary purpose. All three, therefore, may be fairly considered to have passed away so far as

[1] Miller, "Bampton Lectures," p. 27.

any obligation to observe them, or even to respect them, is concerned."

Now I have supposed a candid objector to be urging this, and to have been brought to his conclusion by no captious considerations. I will draw further upon his candour, and ask him three or four questions which I will entreat him to apply to the passages before us.

I. Is it not possible that beneath a positive precept, applicable to special circumstances, there may be latent a large and general principle, applicable to a wider field?

II. Is it not possible that some precepts, though primarily very simple, may have an extended and analogical significancy, which none but a person of very contracted views can overlook?

III. As in law, a *cyprès* or approximate administration of an obsolete trust, is admissible, so, in reference to the Bible, is it not possible, and indeed incumbent upon you, to apply what seems obsolete to cases very nearly resembling those for which they were originally intended?

IV. As you interpret circumstances of ordinary life and the regulations of human society with something like common sense, and equi-

table explanation and modification, should not a similar method be readily conceded in matters relating to the Bible and the religion contained therein?

Well, taking an affirmative issue to these questions *pro concesso*, let me apply them.

The Sabbath, regarded in its true light, was an institution peculiar to the Hebrew commonwealth. The time of its first mention in the Bible,—I mean at the giving of the manna; the positive character of the day, the seventh, on which it was to be celebrated; the commemorative associations with which it is connected in the Book of Deuteronomy, namely, Israel's servitude in Egypt and his deliverance from that servitude; the way in which it is mentioned by the prophets, as an observance of a federal nature between God and Israel, and various other circumstances,—all point to this conclusion. And on the determination of the Hebrew commonwealth, and the winding-up, so to speak, of the dispensation connected with it, this institution determined also. But then, besides its other aspects, the Sabbath was the expression of a religious instinct acknowledging the duty of devoting a certain time to the service of God. This underlay the particular and special ordinance. And this, as it might have

been expected to survive, does actually survive in another special form, the Christian Sunday, which is indicated in the New Testament, and has been admitted since Christianity began. Therefore, it need be no objection to Christianity that a precept no longer intended to be observed is not observed—nay, that it is expressly declared to be abolished in the letter. Another ordinance, carrying out the general principle of which the Sabbath was a special application, is acknowledged to have superseded it.

Then with regard to the precept, "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." Doubtless, even under the Old Testament, besides the kindness to animals which it directly inculcates, it had an analogical significancy such as St. Paul invests it with in 1 Cor. ix. 9. Indeed, he feels this so strongly, as for a time to ignore the subordinate lesson altogether. Much in the same way, I may remark, in Hosea vi. 6, God's preference of inward feelings to mere outward exhibition of them is conveyed by the strong proverbial expression, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." And St. Paul's view of the passage now in question is evidenced by his application of it. The command is, he declares,

so far as Christians are concerned, to be taken in an analogical sense. Doth God care for oxen? Nay, it was written for the sake of us, he says, of us, the agents in God's spiritual husbandry in the ground of His Church. It was written, that is, to enforce what is found elsewhere, and what is suggested even by Natural Religion, "The labourer is worthy of his hire." Be the precept, then, I say, in its literal sense, as narrow as you please, it is, in its analogical sense, which indeed may be yet further extended, as broad as the most liberal philanthropist can desire.

These, however, the objector may say, are instances drawn from the Jewish law. Granting that my scruples in regard to them have been removed or qualified by the interpretations suggested—and granting also, what my friendly controversialist doubtless implies, that they are fair specimens of their respective classes, what is to be said of the third precept, "Abstain from things offered to idols?" Can that system of religion and morals have anything like a Divine origin, which contains in it an injunction so narrow in its character, so petty I had almost said, so manifestly temporary? Yet it appears, so the Christian documents inform me, upon the *Acta* of an

Apostolical council, and is further enforced by one whom I am to suppose versed in "all mysteries and all knowledge," St. Paul, in a missive to the Corinthian Church.

Well, much of this is true, I reply, but the Apostles were not merely legislators, so to speak, for the Church of the future, but administrators of the Church actually existing in their day. They may, therefore, surely be pardoned, if, in the latter of these capacities, they issued, and even earnestly enforced, regulations and cautions which current circumstances appeared to demand. And it may be further urged, the Scriptures are not, and do not profess to be, legislation only. They are historical testimonies as to what has actually taken place. It is then scarcely fair to object to them that what was intended to be merely a temporary regulation is not, in its precise terms, a regulation applicable for ever. Whether, indeed, the exact circumstances of scandal being thus caused to new converts may not be reproduced, so long as heathen countries exist where Christians are but a small and struggling element, is another question. But I would not rest my answer to your objection upon the affirmative issue to this. It demands a broader reply.

Let it be supposed, then, that idol-worship is now utterly abolished—that the very debased form of Theism, under which it used to be practised, has utterly disappeared—and that scandal can no longer be caused to weak consciences in the particular way against which the precept was intended to provide. Does it follow, therefore, that the precept is useless? I will put an analogous case. A bequest of money was made long ago for the purpose of redeeming Christians who might be captured by Algerine pirates. That sort of captivity has now altogether ceased. Is there no *cyprès* process in law by which that bequest may be expended for purposes resembling those intended by the testator? Clearly there is such a process—clearly there are similar purposes—and to them the bequest may most righteously be applied. So here. Weak consciences still remain—remain, though this particular stumbling-block is removed. And so long as they do remain, they are entitled to the charitable overstraining of this precept, so some might call it, which St. Paul has made. For, you will observe, he goes beyond the letter. He does not merely say, I will eat no flesh offered to idols. He oversteps this. He says much more. I will eat no flesh at all, I will consult

not merely the perhaps well-founded scruples, but even the unreasonable prejudices of my brethren, in my great charity. I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

And if my objector replies to me—but is not this something like accommodation, in the worst acceptation of that word? Is it not something like explaining away the literal meaning of a precept? Nay, I rejoin, is it not common sense? And is common sense, in its true acceptation, ever opposed to the moral sense? Can it be for a moment imagined that He whom we Christians consider to be the Supreme Legislator, and so, to be most intimately acquainted with the constitution of His creatures, has bound them or intended to bind them by precepts so hard and precise, as to admit of no expansion or modification, under altered circumstances? The very precepts which you consider hard and precise possess the very elasticity which you desire. At least they are found to possess it, when carefully examined. And mark this. Even in the interpretation of strictly human enactments, the judge looks to the general tendency as well as to the particular wording of a statute, and qualifies the latter by the former. And many occasions are found on

which he finds it necessary to examine the history of the law before him, and the circumstances under which it was passed, lest *summum jus* should be productive of *summa injuria*. With every respect, then, for the demur of our objector, we must entreat him to reconsider it by the lights of history, of analogy, and, above all, of charity.

Dismissing, however, this part of my subject, I come to the second objection, made also, I am willing to believe, in all honesty.

It was this:—

There occur in the Bible certain precepts which are applicable to no time, which are utterly Utopian in their character, and which, if carried literally into effect, would render it absolutely impossible for society to go on.

Well, let us see what these are, or at least, as in reference to the former class, treat of two or three alleged instances, the treatment of which may guide persons in the resolution of difficulties connected with instances resembling them.

One is brought forward from the Sermon on the Mount, where it occurs as a direct general command, professing to have been given by Christ.

Another, from St. Paul's writings, where it is

in a form obviously implying a general command.

A third is our Text, which though it was addressed to an individual, appears, so urges our objector, from the remark afterwards made by Christ to His disciples, to have been intended to have a wider application.

The first is, "I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go with him a mile, go with him twain."

The second is, "Charity thinketh no evil," an assertion, which, says our objector, obviously implies, Let no man dive into the designs of his neighbour, or if he has reason to believe them ill-intentioned, judiciously provide against them.

The third is, "Go thy way, sell whatever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, take up the Cross and follow me."

Now, says the objector, how can I suppose a document containing such precepts as these to have proceeded from one who, is *ex hypothesi*, identical with the Author of Human Society? They strike at the root of all permanence

and security in the Society which He has ordained.

Of course we may readily admit, and it would be folly to attempt to do otherwise, that if every one were to carry out literally these precepts, society could not go on. Men would be at the disposal of the very worst of their kind: the gentle of the violent, the undesigning and unsuspicious of the plotter, the industrious of the idle. But would this state of things be *society* at all? Does not that word imply a governing and controlling power, a relation and correlation of every part, a protection of the weak against the strong, an assurance of the rights of property, an enforcement of the duty of self-maintenance, a discountenancing of the indolent and the aggressor, a surveillance over those whose characters afford grounds of suspicion? And must not the carrying out of such functions be entrusted to some one who, in carrying them out, must divest himself, in a great measure, and by doing violence to his private feelings, of the tempers described, at least in the first and second of the above precepts? It is necessarily so. In the case of war, harsh deeds, unjustifiable in time of peace, must be performed and allowed. So, in their public capacity, men have to suppress to some

considerable extent, the tenderness, the gentleness, the unsuspiciousness, which, as private persons, they feel bound to entertain. Their object of course is, eventually to leaven society with the tone which should pervade the individual soul. Hence we see that the first of the precepts to which allusion has been made, though couched in general terms, refers primarily to the individual, as strictly such. In their capacity of private persons men should be ready to suffer hurt rather than inflict it, to give way rather than to be aggressive, to be unsuspicious rather than to believe that those about them are on the watch for occasions to injure them. But every one has a duty to the whole body as well as to himself. A man cannot, and he dares not, suppose that if an injury is committed on himself, this injury will be the only instance in which the aggressor, if left unnoticed or unpunished, will infringe upon his neighbour's rights. Therefore, though he nourishes no private feelings of revenge, and internally forgives and even pities the offender, he is obliged to sink self in regard to the safety of the community. And so again, as to the second precept, about "thinking no evil." A man does not suppose every one whom he meets to be inclined to rob him. And if he

does not leave his property unguarded, or his house open, this is not because he imagines this or that particular person to be ready to take advantage of his negligence. He believes evil of no particular man, until the conviction is forced upon him. But, for the sake of society in general, he is bound to be careful against the evil which he knows to exist in it, and which, by negligence, he would foster and encourage, instead of preventing.

The transcendental precepts, then, as they are sometimes called, which occur in Scripture, are only applicable in a secondary sense to society, at least to society as it exists at present. They apply primarily to the individual. Bye and bye they may be directly applicable to both. Meanwhile, however, their contradiction, so to speak, may be and is absolutely necessary, to a certain extent; for every one is, in his degree, one of those interested in the maintenance of society, and so, is one of those who "beareth not the sword in vain." This passage, and the explanation with which I have prefaced it, may, I trust, do away with much of our objector's difficulty. He can scarcely help seeing that before the tendency of one text is pronounced upon, it is necessary to compare it with other texts, and with the general bearing of Scripture.

When this has been done, the moral precepts of the God of Scripture will be found not unaccordant with those of the God of Nature.

But, the objector will say, scarcely one word of your argument will apply to the third mentioned of the precepts, "Sell all thou hast, and give to the poor." This, at any rate, is thoroughly Utopian, and if for no other reason, for that, flippantly perhaps, but very tersely and epigrammatically, given by Archbishop Whately, "If all were sellers, there would be no buyers." It would certainly destroy Society if every individual acted upon it. And if only a few did so, the crowd of the poor would, instead of being diminished, be only so much increased. Can I imagine such a precept to have proceeded from one who is God?

In reply to this, in the first place, I have, advisedly, thus far directed my answer to the objections grounded on the first and second precepts only. I have hitherto not said one word upon this which has been alleged to be a third precept. And secondly, I have not, for my own part, asserted it to be a precept at all. If I have said anything of the sort, it only amounted to this. There may be some truth in the opinion that Christ's words related to the early days of Christianity, when the band of Apostles

and their followers, who were occupied in evangelizing the world, abandoned all earthly possessions and all earthly entanglements. This, however, they did, not in order to be idle, but for their work's sake. And, as they worked, they were, like other workmen, entitled to be supported by the community. But it was not all, and it cannot be all, in any age of the world, who are thus summoned, or who, if summoned, have faith enough in the work to which they are summoned, to obey. The words contain, no doubt, a lesson of extensive application; but they do not therefore constitute a precept, either generally or for him to whom they are uttered.

Well, but, rejoins the objector, if the words do not constitute a precept, what possible meaning am I to assign to them?

This I will endeavour to show.

An illustration drawn from my own knowledge will put the case of the person mentioned in the Text, and Christ's treatment of it, in a clear light.

Some years ago, a young man, who had been at one of our universities and obtained distinction but not completed his degree, went out to one of our distant foreign settlements. He was, I understand, outwardly well conducted, of

amiable manners, and of good presence, as well as possessed of energy and ability. But either because he did not find himself and his acquirements sufficiently appreciated, or for some other reason, he applied to the Bishop of the settlement for Ordination, professing, or at least implying, that he desired the work of the ministry for its own sake. The Bishop, of course, commended him for his self-devotedness, but he had sufficient acquaintance with the world to know that, especially in a newly formed society, the position of a clergyman was not unfrequently desired from motives inferior to the highest, that a certain rank accompanied it which made men anxious to obtain it. He was aware also that men sometimes aspired to it, drawing their ideas of its nature from a view of its encouragements rather than of its hindrances. So he determined to put his earnestness to the test, and to show him that he who would be a Minister of Christ must encounter hardness. He sent him some miles up the country where there was a school for native children requiring a patient instructor in the truths of Christianity. "Teach these," he said, "bear with them patiently, with their bad habits, their squalor, their ignorance, their obstinacy, their backslidings—and bye and bye we will think of

Ordination." The test did its work; in less than two months the young man returned to the settlement, acknowledging with shame and sorrow that the ministry was not for him; and, so far as seeking for Ordination was concerned, the Bishop heard of him no more.

But to turn from the illustration to the fact.

Immediately after that touching passage in Christ's career, in which He is represented as taking young children in His arms and blessing them, and exhorting all men to follow their innocency, something of this sort took place:— A young man, whom St. Luke represents as a certain ruler, and who was obviously a person of wealth and consideration, at any rate in his own district, met the Saviour. His hurried and impassioned demeanour, his sudden and unprefaced address, showed that he had somewhat upon his mind, and his own words, which he uttered in a kneeling attitude, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have or inherit life?" proved clearly that, from some cause or other, the ordinarily stagnant condition of a prosperous soul, "taking its ease, eating, drinking, and making merry," had in his case been disturbed. After some other parley, Christ said to him, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Which

commandments? was the young man's reply, either in indignation that he could be supposed deficient in any one of them, or with the hope, that after the manner of some Jewish sects of that day, this New Teacher would select some particular commandment, by an exaggerated observance of which his neglect of other commandments might be compensated for. But he is disappointed. A plain and succinct account of his duties to his neighbour is furnished to him, concluding with, according to St. Matthew, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "All this," he says, and we may believe he spoke with sincerity, "All this I have kept from my youth up." I say we may believe he spoke with sincerity, for when Jesus heard these things, He loved him, loved him for what He saw good in him, and determined if possible, to rouse him from doing things as a matter of routine, from going right merely because he had no great temptation to go wrong, from negative doing no harm, to positive and active well-doing. "What," the Saviour seems to say, "What, if I were to test thee after the manner thou dost demand? What if I were to give thee some great thing to do? What if I were to call upon thee to love thy neighbour by resigning all to him, instead of

merely giving to him out of thine abundance; to learn then, how different a thing it is to keep the commandments in adversity and to keep them in prosperity? To be the servant of all, instead of ruling all? To take up the Cross, instead of wearing soft clothing in kings' houses? All common things, all duties such as ordinary men are contented with, are out of the question in such a case as thine, by thine own statement, is: thy ambition is an heroic one—hear then an heroic duty. "One thing thou lackest, if thou wilt be perfect. Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the Cross and follow Me." We wait anxiously for the result—Alas! As in the modern case, the test has done its work: the young man goes silently and sorrowfully away, his talkative zeal hushed—his joyous enthusiasm checked. He has great possessions, and his heart is set upon them; or, at least, as they render virtue tolerably easy to him—as the world applauds such virtue and such unimpeachable respectability as he has long maintained, why should he trouble himself with Christ?

Now if this be a correct account of the transaction, it is evident that so far from

establishing a general precept that *everything* is to be given up and voluntary poverty embraced by those who would be Christ's disciples, and so far again from laying down, as some have supposed, what is called a counsel of perfection, which it is meritorious though not necessary to pursue, our Lord was rather teaching one self-sufficient man his emptiness, and answering him according to his folly. Tenderly and skilfully He performed His task. Each word that He uttered was calculated to awake the dreamer out of his sleep. His look and gesture as well as His tone showed His love towards him—and it is not until the enumeration of the commandments has failed to raise in him a perception of their boundless significancy, and of the impossibility of exhausting their requirements, that He applies the last sharp remedy. The patient takes his departure; he will carry the wound with him to the grave, yea, he will cherish it though it bring him to the grave, rather than submit himself to the cure.

And what I have just asserted is confirmed by the sequel. Though our Lord said immediately, perhaps before the footfall of the retreating young man had ceased to be heard, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter

into the kingdom of God," He subjoined an interpretative qualification, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God." As if He had said, "That young man might have kept his riches, had he not trusted in them, had he not divided his heart between them and God—had he not proved his heart to be so divided, and his virtue so shallow and half-hearted, by declining, when summoned, to surrender them.

The truth is that Christ's disciples are not called upon to leave the world literally, but, though living in it, to live above it. Our Saviour did not pray for those nearest to Him that they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be delivered from the evil. St. John did not desire those who said "what shall we do," to leave their respective callings, but to conduct themselves honestly in them. Those whose names are splendid with "the most hallowed light, have (says an eloquent writer) in their day moved along all the paths of life—among the saints of Christendom have been, and are, men of toil and trade, the craftsman and the merchant, the pleader, the man of letters, orators, lawgivers, warriors and leaders of mighty hosts, princes, and queens, and emperors. In all ranks, and all orbits of the civil

state, men mortified in soul, as St. Paul, have lived unto Christ their Lord; none have so fulfilled their tasks of life as they, because they were above them all." Thus it might have been with the rich young man—but thus it was not. There was that in his heart which rendered his words a mere profession. And we cannot doubt, from the particular test by which Christ proved his character, that, perfectly as he declared he loved his neighbour, a niggardly spirit made him keep all his riches to himself:—

> "It was the little rift within the lute,
> That, ever widening, slowly silenced all;
> Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
> That, rotting inward, slowly mouldered all."

Revealed Religion, and the Bible to which it appeals as its charter, may have other objections to them. But no man need desert them in favour of Natural Religion, on the plea that the precepts found in the Bible are either too narrow in their character, or too transcendental in their aims, to suit the requirements of Human Society.

LECTURE VI.

NUMBERS xxxi. 1, 2.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel on the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered to thy people.

"'SHALL not the Judge of all the earth do right?' was the expostulation of Abraham with the Almighty, in deprecating the destruction of Sodom. So far as that particular case was concerned, Abraham was at length satisfied,—nay, I may perhaps say, more than satisfied. If ten righteous persons were found therein, not merely were those ten to be spared whilst the unrighteous were destroyed, but even the unrighteous were to be spared for the sake of those ten. And, when the condition was not fulfilled, the preservation of Lot and of the obedient members of his family from the midst of the overthrow no doubt assisted Abraham in changing his question into an affirmative position, 'The Judge of all the earth does right.' But I saw, in an

address, delivered not long ago, by a notorious impugner of Revelation, an attack upon the justice of God in reference to the destruction of various nations of Canaan by the Israelites. It was there denounced in such strong terms, and was so clearly shown, if discriminating at all, to be discriminating merely in severity, that I confess my faith is staggered. The God of Revelation seems to be so different from what I should have expected Him to be, if He is the same as the God of whom my moral sense informs me, that, unless my difficulties can be cleared up, I must abandon both Him and the Bible."

So speaks an objector, to whom I give credit for all sincerity, and whom I believe to be one of those many who are in danger of becoming unbelievers, because, from want of some fixed principles for answering Bible difficulties, they are at the mercy of persons who assault the Bible in detail. It would be easy, of course, to show that the events to which objections are made, are not merely unfairly represented, but often falsely stated. For example, in the very address to which allusion has been just made, the scoffer informs his audience that "Joshua led the Israelites across the river Jordan, the water being conveniently heaped up on either

side to afford a dry passage, and thus brought them into the promised land." If he is not intentionally misleading them, he is carelessly quoting from memory, and confounding the passage through the Red Sea with that over the river Jordan. For the sacred record is on this wise. "The waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap, and those that came down towards the sea of the Plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho." And the two occurrences are clearly distinguished in the 114th Psalm, "The sea saw that, and fled, Jordan was driven back." But I would not rest my reply to real difficulties, for such I acknowledge these to be, on the evidences of ignorance or carelessness displayed in such effusions. They might and would be explained away as errors of reporting or of haste, but the real difficulties would remain.

I shall consider, then, to-day, according to my original plan, the case of those who cannot reconcile the apparently undiscriminating destruction of whole communities recorded in the Bible, even to man's idea of justice and retribution, and are much less able to reconcile it to any idea worthy of the justice of God. I will only observe in passing, that this is quite a distinct subject

from that which was discussed in my Second Lecture. My object *there* was to show how the commendation given in the Bible to the very imperfect agents employed by God in His special missions of a judicial character, could be reconciled to our moral sense. My object *here*, is to justify the morality of the special missions themselves, both generally, and in such particular details of their carrying out as appear to have the Divine approval.

The instances commonly alleged are the treatment of the Midianites before the Eisodus, the extermination of the native inhabitants of Canaan at the Eisodus, and the destruction of the Amalekites in the time of Saul. There are, indeed, others, but if a principle, or principles, can be discovered by which the action taken in these may be justified, the objector will be enabled to handle those others for himself.

The first instance is that of the Midianites.

Upon this our objector remarks—"There cannot be the slightest doubt that God is represented in the Bible as sanctioning, and even enjoining, to the very minutest particulars, everything that befel this nation. I read, in Numbers xxv. 16—18, 'The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them, for they vex you with their wiles, where-

with they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake.' I read again, in Numbers xxxi. 1, 2, 'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.' And I read further, in the same chapter, first, that Moses made the quarrel of Israel God's quarrel, saying to the people, 'Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian:' secondly, that even after war had been made, and every adult male of Midian smitten, including the five kings of Midian, and Balaam the son of Beor, the command of God was supposed to have been but insufficiently performed. An additional act of severity was enjoined by Moses, the responsibility for which does not appear to rest with him, but to be thrown, by the terms of his expostulation, upon the Almighty Himself. 'And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.'

'Every woman, therefore, that hath known man by lying with him,' was to be killed. Nor is this enough, for, by what has been represented to me as a refinement of cruelty, 'Every male among the little ones' was to be slaughtered—while 'all the women children which had not known a man by lying with him,' the Israelites were to 'keep alive for themselves.'

"Now on this narrative arise the following questions:

"1. On what principle can the slaughter of the Midianites be justified generally?

"2. On what principle can the details of it, and the details accompanying it, be justified?

"It would seem, (I am still using the words of an objector,) as if God, the excellence of whose moral attributes I would fain uphold, enjoined, in the first place, invasion of rights of neighbours, who had done no special wrong; and, secondly, even granting that some wrong had been committed, a wholesale and promiscuous vengeance. And it would seem further, that when His injunction had been rather mercifully interpreted, He demanded a refined carrying out of it which involved many who must have been absolutely innocent, in death, and many others, in hopeless servitude. How can I reconcile these things to His attributes of

Justice, of Mercy and Truth? They are too hard for me. They are moral stumbling-blocks which interfere with my reception of the Bible. And I have also an historical difficulty connected with this subject. The very Midianites, whom I have just seen thus ruthlessly destroyed, spring up again in a few years. In less than two centuries, 'the hand of Midian prevails against Israel, and because of the Midianites the children of Israel make them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds. And so it was that when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers (or locusts) for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites: and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. How can these people, who were exterminated by Moses, have come again into existence and even into power? Into such power that the

Israelites are suffering themselves from Midian what Moab told the elders of Midian he feared they would inflict? 'Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.' I am reminded, almost irresistibly, of the legends of the Volsci and Æqui in Roman history. They are discomfited with a fearful slaughter, but straightway are found in force again. Can it be that the record of the second event is true? If it be, what becomes of the truth of the former event? The severe sentence could not have been carried out. And thus, an objection lies against God's Power to enforce what He has decreed."

Thus far our objector. I proceed to answer him.

It scarcely falls within my plan to discuss historical difficulties at present. But this particular difficulty may be met so easily that it is as well to dismiss it at once. It should be remembered, then, that the Midianites, although they had several fixed settlements on the borders of Moab, were essentially a roving and pastoral tribe. Those who were subdued, or rather exterminated by Moses, at the command of God, were obviously the dwellers in towns. But the vast multitude of the same race who roved up

and down the Arabian peninsula, were sufficient to re-people the towns, and, assisted by the Amalekites and some wild eastern tribes, to inflict those miseries upon Israel which are described in the Book of Judges. The operations in the Book of Numbers were obviously directed merely against the settled neighbours of the Israelites, and did not affect the whole nation. The operations in the Book of Judges so entirely broke the strength of the nation that they were final. "Thus was Midian subdued before the Children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more." It may be added, in confirmation of what has been said, that the Midianites slain by Moses had evidently ceased to be nomadic. No camels are mentioned in the booty. But camels appear to form part of the invader's strength on the second occasion, for when Gideon slew Zebah and Zalmunnah, "he took away the ornaments that were on the necks of their camels." Thus, whether the old settlements of Midian had been re-occupied or no, (and the chronology of the period is so doubtful as to render both their re-occupation and any renewal of strength possible,) there was a sufficient remnant of Midianitish warriors to conduct the invasion in the days of Gideon, though the narrative of Moses be true to the

very letter. Some indeed of the settled Midianites may have escaped from Moses; but as there is no evidence of this, so it is probable that had it been so, it would have been mentioned. In a somewhat parallel case (1 Kings ii. 16), Joab is said to have remained in Edom "for six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom." But we find immediately subjoined, "Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him."

The objection, then, to God's Power, and to the historical correctness of the Bible, so far as this particular occurrence is concerned, being thus removed, I return to the two questions immediately before me.

But before I answer them positively, it is necessary in order to clear the way, that I make a negative statement, relating chiefly to the second of the two questions.

I would, then, as I said in my Fourth Lecture, repudiate most decidedly the principle, that God, in His commands to men, accommodates Himself to the low standard of morals or practice prevailing at any particular period. It was not necessary, as I hope was there shown satisfactorily, to justify Abraham's personal action in the matter of Isaac's sacrifice, on the ground that, being accustomed to such sacri-

fices, his moral sense would not be shocked by the character of the command which he received. It is equally unnecessary to justify the judicial action of Moses and Israel upon Midian, by a plea based upon the following assertion: that they were so accustomed to undiscriminating barbarities in war, that no severity which they could be enjoined to practise upon their enemies, could disgust, or for a moment startle them. I am aware that this view is enunciated by Dr. Arnold, and that he has adduced two remarkable passages from Homer, in order to support, what I do not feel inclined to dispute, his assertion, that the moral sense of the ancients was often singularly hardened and perverted as to matters of warfare. The one is from the *Iliad*, vi. 55—62, where the poet expresses his approbation of the advice given by Agamemnon to Menelaus, not to spare a single Trojan, young or old, even to the babe in its mother's womb. The other is from the *Odyssey*, where the poet describes with indifference and almost with exultation, the sufferings and the execution of all the female slaves of their household, by Ulysses and Telemachus. I am quite unable to see that the establishment of a low condition of the moral sense generally among the ancients is anything

to the purpose. God does not appear in Homer or in other heathen poets as commanding destruction. God is not in the background, in something like visible Majesty, as a King and a Judge of the wicked, desiring His ministers to execute vengeance—and by necessary inference enjoining the suspension, for a time, of ordinary feelings. God does not appear, in the midst of a camp, as a Captain of the host, directing the removal of whatever may impede the morality and discipline of the invading forces—or the clearance of all impediments to the occupation of an invaded territory. All these conditions are found in the Bible narrative. Were they not found there—had the Israelites been left to themselves, and had they carried on the Midianitish war, as entirely unguided and unbiassed, as the Greeks carried on their war with the Trojans, we might have used Dr. Arnold's parallel to account for, I do not say to justify, the deeds which they committed. In the same way, we might and do account for the immoral tendency of the productions of some brilliant writer, by alleging the low tone of his day. But this solution, so it seems to me, is utterly inadequate to explain the fact that such a command proceeded from God, and that God's people executed it as coming from Him. He

must have had high designs in issuing the command, and they must have had something better to ensure their obedience than the mere fact that it coincided with, or did not clash with, the barbarous maxims of their period.

In failure, then, of Dr. Arnold's principle of interpretation, I proceed to lay down other principles which, I believe, will adequately account for the following facts :

1. The dealings of God in commanding the whole of the transactions relating to Midian.

2. The ministration of the Israelites who carried out His command.

3. The fortunes of the Midianites themselves who suffered by the execution of that command.

4. The fortunes of other nations who suffered by the execution of commands, similar in kind, though different in degree.

5. The difference in degree which commands, similar in kind, exhibit.

The thoughtful reader of the Bible may, I think, discover thus much of the designs of the Almighty in His earlier external revelations to man, and in His earlier personal interpositions in the affairs of man :

Certain truths of natural religion which men had been gradually allowing to be effaced from

the tablets of their hearts, required, if not to be rewritten thereon, yet to be brought by the breath of the Divine Presence into clearness and distinctness:

These truths or principles were as follow:

The kingship of the Deity, and its superiority in supervision and providence to that of any human chieftain. The equity of God's supreme government, and the manifestation that it is not, and cannot be, confined by the limits of this life. God's ability, and His determination, to assign their due requital both to sin and to righteousness. The confirmation of these positions, by such indications of His rewards and punishments in this life, as should, both by their occurrence and by the exceptions to it, direct mankind to another life, where God's scheme should be more fully developed. The fact that His kingship is perpetual, lasting from one generation to another, and not admitting the change of policy which transmitted kingship necessarily implies. The responsibility of every man to Him, not merely for what he does himself, but for what he teaches his children and others. The fact that the self-same law which involves descendants in the physical fortunes of their ancestors, involves them also in the effects of their ancestors' moral delin-

quencies. Yet that, coincidently with all this, a grand dispensation of justice is being carried on which makes allowance for such difficulties on the part of the descendants as are not self caused; which neither demands equal goodness where equal opportunities have not been given, nor fails to make up by a future life for a shortened or dwarfed existence in this. That, besides their individual life, men have also a life corporate; and that, as Divine Forbearance is not to be expected by them for ever in their former aspect, so it cannot be in the latter. That, under God, who is the Lord of conscience as well as the Lord of nature, men and nations may be occasionally made the ministers of His vengeance, as well as the elements, and what are popularly but erroneously called casualties. That, as God's ministers, men and nations may from time to time be commanded to execute His commands, as impassively and as readily, as the earthquake, or the flood, or the whirlwind. That even the irregular flowings and ebbings of men's passions may be employed for this purpose. Yet that men, when they have thus served God's purposes, are to return as regularly to their normal moral course, as the sea, when the wind has spent its strength, or the river, when the mountain torrents have abated,

resume their respective bounds or channels. That, as it rests with God to say to the sea, "thus far shalt thou go, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed," so, it is God's prerogative to determine the manner and degree, in and to which, nations and individuals shall be visited, and the point at which His human ministers of vengeance shall arrest their hand. That even when, through their imperfection, the human ministers of God's vengeance seem to be merely gratifying their own lusts, they are, though condemning themselves, working out His designs upon others. That, though their execution of His commands may often bring about reverses entangling the innocent with the guilty, a future existence will rectify all such inequalities. That, accordingly, the conscious agents therein will eventually have no reason to be scandalized, the unconscious agents no reason to be grieved, and the sufferers no reason to complain. That the very ministers of God's vengeance may, through their unrighteousness either in the performance of their special mission, or in their general conduct, contemporaneously with it, or after it has been accomplished, find themselves in their turn the objects of His wrath. That other ministers of God, both

natural and moral, may in turn be set in motion against them, just as they were set in motion against others.

These were some of the truths which, as I have said, God's earlier external revelations to man, and God's earlier personal interpositions in the affairs of man, were designed to rewrite, or at least to revive the characters of, on the hearts of His creatures. They were indeed invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, but they might have been clearly seen in the things that were made, and they involved the acknowledgment of His Eternal Power and Godhead; they were, however, not seen, they were not acknowledged; and, inexcusable as men were for their blindness and their ignorance, God condescended to reveal them again by special interpositions of His Providence and by special revelations of His Will.

Well, by the assistance of these truths or principles, we may, I think, be enabled to give a very probable solution of nearly all the difficulties which have offended the moral sense of our objector.

The Israelites and their successive leaders, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Saul, and David, besides acting in their individual capacity, acted in that of ministers of God. The appointment

of such ministers may indeed be said to have commenced with Noah, but the tenure of such office, after having been gradually limited through Shem, Abraham, and Isaac, was committed specially to Israel and those sprung from him. Men had failed to discern the Judge of all the earth in God's providence before the Deluge. The intimations that *He* directed the Flood, and that *He* sent fire from heaven on the cities of the Plain, might have revived that knowledge, but they did not, or if it was revived for the moment, it was not retained by them. They neither reasoned on His present dealings, nor looked forward to a time when the apparent difficulties in them should be cleared up. So, in part, coincidently with this state of things, and more fully afterwards, a man, a family, and a nation by its leaders, were commissioned, sometimes to invoke the elements, sometimes to use the lower creation, sometimes to direct the powers of nature, sometimes to employ the arm of the flesh to chastise offenders. Hence God's hearkening to the voice of a man in the Egyptian plagues, in the Red Sea overthrow, in the arrest of the earth's course "so that the sun did not go down, and the moon stayed," in the march of the Israelites upon Canaan, and in the discomfiture of those whom they met both on their way

thither, and on their reaching its borders. And lest the Israelites should be tempted to imagine that they were executing their own will, they were checked by the following restraints. God was continually communicating His commands to them. He was present as the Captain of their host, in His tent or tabernacle in the midst of the camp. They were therefore left with no more discretion, so far as their duty to perform His special mission was concerned, than the senseless elements which destroy in the wholesale that against which they are directed, or, at the utmost, than the soldiers of an army, who have to carry out, without arguing upon them, the orders of their captain. Sometimes they might have had to repress their natural feelings of humanity, sometimes to waste, so it seemed, both human life and substance. But these things, in their capacity of God's ministers of vengeance, they were bidden to do. And though their task was difficult, it was a training for the acknowledgment of a higher and final adjustment of things. Meanwhile, these matters were made unmistakeably evident to them. The nations whom they were to assail were sinners, and they were commissioned to destroy them. The commission varied in its particulars; as it varied, so must their conduct in reference

to them. And if they stepped aside from their tracks which were made thus evident, they were speedily recalled to obedience by finding either God's dumb ministers, the lower creation or the elements, or else human ministers, such as the nations whom they ought to have destroyed, turned against them. And so it was also if in their private capacity they turned to sin. For, both during the performance of their task, and after its full accomplishment, they were personally to stand before the Lord of conscience, and to direct themselves by His guidance. Almost in the words of Dean Milman, "Almighty Providence had determined to extirpate a race of bloody, licentious, and barbarous idolaters, and to replace them by a people of milder manners and truer religion. Instead of the earthquake, the famine, or the pestilence, the valour of this yet uncivilized people, the Israelites, was allowed free scope. The war in which the Hebrew tribes were embarked was stripped of none of its customary horrors and atrocities; nor was it till these savage and unrelenting passions had fulfilled their task, that the influence of their milder institutions was to soften and humanize the national character. Then the whole victorious nation was suddenly to pause in its career. Thus far, they were like

hordes of Tartars, Scythians, or Huns, bursting irresistibly from their deserts, and sweeping away every vestige of human life; at a given point, their arms were to fall from their hands, the thirst of conquest was to subside, and a great, unambitious, agricultural republic—with a simple religion, an equal administration of justice, a thriving and industrious population, brotherly harmony, and mutual good-will between all ranks, domestic virtues, purity of morals, gentleness of manners—was to arise in the midst of the desolation their arms had made, and under the very roofs—in the vineyards and corn-fields—which they had obtained by merciless violence." It need only be added to this description of the human agents of whom we are speaking, that their judicial actions were all along clearly distinguishable, as episodes or parentheses in their personal action. Pure worship, purity of life, reliance on God, obedience to their human leaders, contentment at their lot, were enforced by penalties as tremendous, and very often as undiscriminating, as those which they were commissioned to inflict. Sometimes the swords of their own brethren were turned against them; sometimes the very nations whom they were afterwards to destroy, were allowed to prevail against them; some-

times God commanded the serpent to bite them; sometimes a plague broke out amongst them; sometimes even one of their leaders, as Phinehas, was made an executioner on their lust; and because they were all disobedient and faint-hearted, the whole generation of them that came out of Egypt, save only Caleb and Joshua, was condemned to perish in the wilderness.

So much for the Israelites, the *agents* in God's scheme of vengeance.

Whether as a nation and as individuals they fulfilled the law of their mind, confirmed and extended as it thus was by the voice and superintendence of the Almighty, either during their invasion, or after their occupation of the promised land, is a matter of history, upon which a good deal was said in the Second Lecture.

Whether any people can be thoroughly acceptable to God, and keep His law, without the further provisions of a Redeemer and of a Sanctifier, is a momentous question, but does not belong to our present subject.

We now turn to the *sufferers*. Those in the Text were Midianites, men notorious for their personal sins, and besides this, confederate with Moab, both in warlike designs, and, a surer method still of ruining a people, in working the

moral corruption of Israel. For these things they were to suffer, and it is evident that their ruin was intended to be complete and summary. Israel was allowed indeed to possess himself of their substance, but their women were to be put to death. These had been the instruments by which Israel had been assailed. Even the male children were to be destroyed, partly, as we may conceive, because they were likely, bye and bye, to avenge the death of their parents; partly, perhaps, because in a state of society so incurably vicious as that of Midian, they, as we learn is the case with the Arab boys of Palestine at this hour, were already deeply initiated in the iniquities of their elders. The female children were to be preserved. These were God's commands, intelligible, at least generally, on the principles already enunciated; and they were carried out. If it appears hard to account for some of the particulars, if we cannot tell why the female children were to be made slaves, and if, after all that has been said, the lot of the male children, in being cut off untimely, appears severe; two things are to be remembered. It is just as hard to account for the apparently capricious destruction of human life by what are called the accidents of nature. It is just as hard to account for the diversities

in human circumstances in the way of affluence or poverty, in the way of educational culture or the lack of it. It may be urged indeed that, so far as severity is concerned, the lot of the female children was light when compared with that of the rest of their tribe. There is no reason to believe that such captives were treated unkindly by the Israelites. Rahab of Jericho and Ruth the Moabitess were married into the family of Judah, and Christ was descended from them, according to the flesh. The true answer, however, is that this life is not the whole of a man's existence, and that if, which we may acknowledge to be the case, inequalities are tolerated here, a final adjustment of things, already sufficiently foreshadowed, is to be expected hereafter.

And the destruction of the Canaanites, and of the other nations inhabiting the territory promised to Israel, may be justified in the same manner. God had long borne with them. It is evident that even in the days of Abraham, their iniquity, if it had not absolutely culminated, had become notorious and scandalous. Therefore, they were at length to be destroyed utterly, and their possessions were to be transferred to Israel. And so with the Amalekites in Saul's time,—they were to be utterly de-

stroyed also, both for their sins and for their lasting hostility to Israel. And if God commanded the Amalekitish war to be one of absolute extermination, if He forbade even the cattle to be preserved, a reply is ready which may in part account for these things, though it is scarcely for us to discover all the reasons why differences should exist in the details of His command. Some of them have been noticed already, and some further reasons may at least be surmised. The women of Midian were to be destroyed because their presence had been and would be injurious to the Israelites, but the cattle were spared, as being necessary for their subsistence in their yet unsettled condition. But now that the Israelites were settled, now that they were in want of nothing, even the property of Amalek was to be destroyed, lest it should prove an incentive to their covetousness. Of course, as I admit, these were not all the reasons of the arrangement. We shall know all the reasons when we can discover why so much waste, as it seems to us, is allowed in the natural world; why rivers have for ages fertilized regions from which man has derived no benefit; why animal and vegetable life has spent itself, so far as man is concerned, in vain; why some nations have been left uncivilized,

even to the present hour—victims to the most miserable oppression at the hands of their own barbarous rulers that can possibly be imagined; why, even in the midst of civilization, there are myriads of men and women with scarcely more reverence for their Creator than the beasts that perish,—but we shall not know all the reasons till then.

Thus much, however, I may say to the candid objector. The dealings of the God of Revelation, in the matter of extirpating nations, wholly or partially, may be defended more completely than, or quite as completely as, the dealings of the God of Nature.

And I may say this also:

The theory of the ministerial character of the Israelites in the transactions to which you take exception, accounts for much that would be inexplicable if they were to be regarded merely as personal agents. It must be remembered that the amount of success that their arms obtained was quite out of proportion to the forces that they brought into the field, and to their training in the art of war. It may be presumed, then, that the posterity of a herd of bondsmen, who had borne servitude in Egypt without resistance, must have had a capacity different from their personal capacity,

to be enabled to be thus victorious. The only other capacity that can be conceived is that of ministers to One whose arm helped them in what they had to do—marked out the exact limits and method of their procedure—told them both when to advance, and where to pause in their operations—checked them and encouraged them by turns, as it seemed good to Him. It must be remembered, further, that as in the eye of God, the nations stricken by Israel deserved vengeance for their sins, so, even in the eye of man, two of them at least, Midian and Amalek, had been thwarters of the well-doing and progress of Israel, to a degree which imperilled the very existence of the chosen people.

Should direct proof be required of the nature of the principles which regulated the conquest of Canaan, it is to be found in the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy. If the Israelites were ever likely to forget their ministerial office, or their personal relations to God, or the great distinction which existed between these—the words of their dying legislator, recorded there, might serve to recall them to themselves. They are so striking that I venture to quote them: "Understand therefore this day, that the Lord thy God is He which goeth over

before thee; as a consuming fire He shall destroy them, and He shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee. Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people."

They may serve a further purpose. To convince the objector that if God's dealings, and man's action and man's suffering, as represented in the pages of the Bible, are sometimes a riddle, the Bible, when carefully searched, and duly pondered, provides for the riddle a sufficient interpretation.

LECTURE VII.

GENESIS vi. 6.

And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.

IT has often been made an objection to the Bible, that God is spoken of continually, nay, that He sometimes speaks of Himself, in the language of men, that is, in the same manner that men would give utterance to their feelings, or describe the feelings of each other. Expressions are quoted from its pages which seem to indicate, that He not merely possesses passions or emotions, but is subject to fitful and irregular developments of them. He is said to exhibit hatred and vengeance. He is represented as changing His mind and repenting, as being jealous, as having enemies, as having friends. Nor is this all. The ear, the eye, the mouth, the breath, the feet, the hands of the Lord, and other terms implying organic

structure, such as belongs to a finite human body, are of no unfrequent occurrence. He is said to awake out of sleep, to walk in the Garden of Eden, to appear to Abraham, to go down to see whether the people of Sodom and Gomorrah have done altogether according to the cry of their sin, which had come unto Him; and other similar assertions are made by Him or concerning Him. These, it is urged, can only be employed with propriety of a being or by a being subject to the conditions of time, of place, of locomotion, and consequently, of limited intelligence and means of information. And then the inquiry is made triumphantly, How can He who is thus represented in the Bible be identified with the Being of whom Natural Religion informs mankind, a God "without body, parts, or passions, of infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness?" Can any one believe the Bible to have come from God, when it speaks of Him in a manner so obviously at variance with man's preconceptions of Him?

We may, without hesitation, admit the facts alleged. But it is quite another thing to admit the impropriety or unappositeness of the expressions adduced, in a document containing a revelation from God to man concerning Himself.

And if such impropriety or unappositeness is shown to be non-existent, the conclusion, so far as it is supposed to depend upon it, that the Bible is to be rejected as unworthy of God, is unsupported and falls to the ground.

But how are such facts to be explained? They are absolutely inexplicable, says one class of persons, who seem from the tone of their writings, and from the language which they hold publicly, and circulate widely, to be anxious not merely to discredit Revealed Religion, but to establish that there is no God at all. It is impossible to interpret in any other way their blasphemous utterances. One of these, descriptive of the Almighty, couched in the most degrading terms, and conveyed under a most opprobrious image, will doubtless occur to you. I dare not pollute this holy place by repeating it. And not very many years ago there was exhibited in one of our most public thoroughfares, in the shop-front of a notorious Infidel, a print entitled, "The God of the Hebrews explained." It was a representation something like a human form, made up by a literal rendering, and monstrous combination, of various Bible passages descriptive of God's mystical appearance or attributes. These passages were quoted at the foot of the picture

But to my task.

The technical phrase for the objection against the Bible which I have described is, that God is represented in its pages in a manner which savours of *Anthropomorphism*. I shall not dwell upon this formidable Greek word, which, as you are aware, only supplies a convenient way of saying, that God is spoken of as if He possessed the same limited form, and by consequence, the same imperfect conditions of being, and the same attributes of character, which man possesses. I should not have mentioned it at all had it not been necessary to state that the objection originated with the Greek school of philosophy at Alexandria. From that school proceeded the translation of the Older Scriptures into Greek, which is usually called the Septuagint. That translation has few of the difficulties to which I have alluded, as compared with the Hebrew and with our English version. But how, think you, have the difficulties been surmounted? By the summary and simple process of altering the Divine record, if it seemed to clash with the manner in which the translators held that God should speak or be spoken of. A very few instances, which shall be taken from the Books of Genesis and Exodus, will exemplify what I say.

The first passage which I would quote is from Genesis vi. 3. There, both in the Hebrew and in our version, occurs a declaration, made by the Almighty, "My Spirit shall not always strive [1] with man." The word which is translated *strive,* admits of no possible doubt as to its meaning. It does not appear that any different reading ever existed. But the Seventy, (I use the ordinary designation of the translators,) chose to substitute another word, which conveyed to their minds somewhat less of human passion. So they rendered the passage, "My Spirit shall not always *abide* [2] with man."

The second passage is our text, Genesis vi. 6. "And it repented [3] the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved [4] Him at His heart." Now there is not the slightest doubt that the words rendered, *it repented,* and *it grieved Him* convey those ideas respectively, and convey nothing else. And *at His heart* have their equivalent in the Hebrew. But the Seventy considered the whole passage to be too indicative of human emotion. So, though they had elsewhere (in Genesis xxxiv. 7) translated an inflexion [5] of the same word *it grieved Him*

[1] לֹא־יָדוֹן [2] οὐ μὴ καταμείνῃ.
[3] וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוָה [4] וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ
[5] וַיִּתְעַצֵּבוּ

faithfully enough, in reference to the vexation felt by the sons of Jacob at the defilement of Dinah, they chose to render it diversely here; they rendered *it repented* by an indifferent word; and omitted *at His heart* altogether. With them the passage stands, "and God *thought seriously* that He had made man on the earth, and He *considered*."[1]

The third passage is in Genesis vi. 9, "And Noah *walked*[2] with God." This seemed to the Seventy to imply that, correlatively, "God *walked* with Noah." So they rendered the Hebrew words by, "And Noah *was well pleasing*[3] to God. The paraphrase was an expedient to get rid of the anthropomorphism.

The fourth passage is in Exodus xii. 13. There the Hebrew says, with our own version, "I will *pass over*[4] you." This offended the Seventy, as appearing to imply movement in space on the part of the Deity. So they rendered it, "I will *protect*[5] you." Inconsistently

[1] καὶ ἐνεθυμήθη ὁ Θεὸς, ὅτι ἐποίησε τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· καὶ διενοήθη.

[2] אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹחַ

[3] τῷ Θεῷ εὐηρέστησε Νῶε. And so of Enoch, εὐηρέστησεν Ἐνὼχ τῷ Θεῷ.

[4] וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵכֶם

[5] σκεπάσω ὑμᾶς.

enough, however, they rendered a part of this same word by He will *pass over*[1] you, in the 23rd verse of the same chapter, and a different word[2] in that verse, He will *pass through* you, as if it had been equivalent to the word, He will *pass over* you.

The fifth passage is in Exodus xv. 3, "The Lord is a *man of war*."[3] The Seventy paraphrased the words conveying this by "The Lord *crusheth wars*,"[4] which seemed to them less objectionable.

The sixth passage, in Exodus xv. 10, "Thou didst *blow with* Thy wind,"[5] they paraphrased with a similar motive, by "Thou didst *send forth* Thy wind."[6]

The last passage that I shall notice is in Exodus xxiv. 11. Here the Hebrew is most fairly conveyed by our English version: "Also *they saw God*, and did eat and drink,"[7] that is, "Though they saw God, they continued the sacrificial meal of the covenant with cheerful countenance." There is no possible ambiguity

[1] וּפָסַח παρελεύσεται.

[2] וְעָבַר παρελεύσεται, instead of διελεύσεται, though וְעָבַרְתִּי is rendered by διελεύσομαι in v. 12.

[3] יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה

[4] Κύριος συντρίβων πολεμους.

[5] נָשַׁפְתָּ בְרוּחֲךָ

[6] ἀπέστειλας τὸ πνεῦμά σου.

[7] וַיֶּחֱזוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ

in the original, but the idea of *seeing God* was offensive to the philosophic mind of the Seventy. It was an anthropomorphism which must be eliminated. So their rendering took another shape, "Also *they were seen*[1] *in the place of God*," that is, the place He had appointed, "and did eat and drink."

I need not quote any more such passages. I have only quoted these in order to show you the way in which I shall *not* explain the difficulties of which our Text is a specimen. I consider it to be a thoroughly disingenuous way. I may add, that after all, as the instances themselves may have proved, it is far from being absolutely successful—and also, that there are countless passages to which, with all their dislike of anthropomorphism, they have not ventured to apply it. "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day," is one of these. It stands out thus, in its pure grandeur, in the Septuagint[2] as well as in the Hebrew,[3] approached, and indeed approachable, by no paraphrase

[1] καὶ ὤφθησαν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἔπιον.

[2] καὶ ἤκουσαν τῆς φωνῆς Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ περιπατοῦντος ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τὸ δειλινόν.

[3] וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּגָּן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם Genesis iii. 8.

save that of Milton, and scarcely perhaps by his:

"Now was the sun in western cadence low
From noon, and gentle airs, due at their hour,
To fan the earth now waked, and usher in
The evening cool; when He, from wrath more cool,
Came the mild Judge and Intercessor both,
To sentence man: the voice of God they heard
Now walking in the Garden, by soft winds
Brought to their ears, while day declined; they heard
And from His presence hid themselves among
The thickest trees, both man and wife; till God
Approaching, thus to Adam called aloud."

Paradise Lost, Book X.

The key to all such passages as have staggered the mind of persons who conceive themselves rightly jealous of the least infringement of the honour of God, is to be found in answers to the three following questions:

1. Who is He who speaks to man in the Bible, or through the Bible?

2. Who is the person spoken to?

3. Considering the nature of the two, what should we, *à priori*, expect to be their feasible mode of intercommunication?

I will take them in order.

1. It is quite unnecessary to adduce the numberless passages in which the spiritual, incorporeal, impassible, immaterial nature of God is set forth. And those in which the infinitude of His Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, or in other words, His Omnipotence, His

Omniscience, and His Universal Benevolence, are mentioned, will readily suggest themselves. They are scattered over the surface of the Bible, or, I should rather say, pervade its inmost texture. He is a Spirit, and cannot be apprehended by human vision; He has no bodily conditions, and cannot be either confined by space, or delineated by form; He is subject to no waywardness of affections, or weakness of will; He is not matter, nor of matter, though pervading, by His ubiquitous Presence, all matter. As for His Power, He made all things, and upholds all things. As for His Wisdom, He adapted each thing for its special end. As for His Goodness, He would fain conserve them all, whether material or moral, for their original ends; and if some of them, the moral for instance, have corrupted themselves, swerved in their course thereto, or indeed forgotten their destinations, He would fain rehabilitate them, revive their languid energies, and re-direct their aims. Such is God, as represented in the Bible, or rather, such does He represent Himself to be, if the Bible is to be admitted to proceed from Him. There may be other representations of Him found therein which appear to be inconsistent with these—but of them I shall say more presently.

I am only concerned at this moment to show, that He who speaks to man in the Bible is, so far as words can convey an idea of His nature, a Being thus to be described.

2. As for man, it is equally unnecessary to cite the terms in which the Bible sets him forth. Suffice it to say, that what your own minds, and hearts, and senses know him to be, such the Bible declares him to be. A being, who, though the breath of the Divine Spirit animates him, is corporeal, moves in space, and is confined in operation; who has an external organized configuration, and an internal moral constitution, both of them liable to be deranged, though originally formed good, and designed for good. A being, whose moral constitution has, from whatever circumstances, become actually so deranged, that, though God be his loving Father, and might, as such, be approached without fear, he is estranged from God, feels terror at the Divine Presence, requires It to be veiled from him by intervening *media*, cannot attune his mortal organs to the reception of directly Divine utterances, needs, in fact, to be reconciled and brought near to God.

3. This sense of estrangement would seem to have come over man immediately after the Fall, that is, so soon as the spiritual and holy

element, though still of right the dominant or royal part of his nature, had begun to yield to the might of the inferior part. Before the Fall the intercourse between man and the Lord God appears to have been unreserved and complete. How the Great Spirit spoke to the spirit of the man which was in him, we know not. But man then conversed with God without fear. Immediately afterwards it was not so. We read of our first parents, that they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. They heard God's voice and they were afraid.

This fear remained. If we would learn something of what it was, we may consult the words of an ancient representative of patriarchal religion, Eliphaz, in the Book of Job,—"Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, He put no trust in His servants; and

His angels He charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?" Some few men, indeed, of eminent faith, as Enoch, as Noah, as Abraham, walked with God, or before God, whatever those mysterious expressions may mean; and Abraham was admitted to the dignity of being the friend of God, and was encouraged not to fear. Yet of Abraham himself we read that, on one occasion at least, and just after a special encouragement had been vouchsafed to him, "when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon him, and lo! a horror of great darkness fell upon him."

As I have already remarked, what were the peculiar powers of man before the Fall, by which he was enabled to hold ineffable converse with God, we know not. But his case after the Fall was such as I have described. It was necessary, then, if intercourse between the upper and the lower world, between the pure Creator and the impure creature, between the Spiritual and the carnal, was to be still maintained, that certain *media* should be resorted to for its maintenance. The time was yet far distant when "where the Spirit of the Lord was, there should be liberty," and when,

(though the fullest manifestation of God is reserved for the resurrection state,) a very close vision of God, in the mirror of Christ's Humanity, should be vouchsafed, (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18.) So, the higher Being must condescend to the lower being, put His glory by for awhile, employ figurative[1] and partial exhibitions of Himself. Otherwise, as even a heathen fable indicated, the disclosed splendours of the Godhead would be too much for the shattered capacities and impaired spirituality of man.

And what was thus to be expected actually took place. God spoke of Himself after the manner of men, and displayed Himself after the manner of men, employing these methods, because the avenues to more spiritual intimations of His Will and Presence had become intercepted. Hence, contemporaneously with continual enunciations of His pure Deity, which were never withdrawn, those other representations to which exception has been made. Hence, the mention of, His voice calling to man; His ear listening to man's words; His eye observing man's deeds; His hand being over man to protect him; His arm upholding him; His wings overshadowing him; His

[1] πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ Θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις, Hebrews i. 1.

standard guiding him. Hence, His interpreting His Providence and those arrangements of it, which man could not fathom, by expressions borrowed from human action, human feeling, human sensation—His making bare His arm: His fighting in man's defence; His pitying or grieving at, or being wrath with, respectively, man's sorrows, or backslidings, or sins; His smelling the sweet savour of a sacrifice and being entreated to spare; His threatening; His repenting of the gracious things that He had done, and reversing or qualifying them; His repenting of the evil that He had threatened, and forbearing to execute it, for man had repented. Hence His remembering; His visiting; His coming down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded; and His coming down to see whether the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had done altogether according to the cry of their sin.

Nor is this all. Hence, (though even these other manifestations were often more than simple man could endure unappalled,) those many instances in which the Infinite assumed the garb of the finite—the mighty God the form of a created angel or of a man, or in which He exhibited Himself to man's eye in cloud or in flame; to man's ear in thunder; to man's

imagination in darkness. Are proofs of these allegations necessary? The Divine voice or Word causes His footsteps to be heard, as of a substantial form, walking in the garden. Abraham stands before the Lord, when the two created angels, His companions, had gone towards Sodom. Both the Lord and they had taken the forms of men, and to confirm this we read that when the interview was concluded, "Jehovah went His way," or rather, what strongly suggests his assumption of a human form, "Jehovah walked away." Jacob wrestles with One in the form of a man till break of day. God twice reveals Himself to Balaam, most probably in human form, for a third time he sees the Angel of Jehovah standing in the way for an adversary against him. Moses sees God in the flame of fire in the bush. God goes before the Israelites by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light. God spake unto Moses, face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend. When Joshua was by Jericho, a man was seen over against him with a sword drawn in his hand. That man announces himself as the Captain of the Lord's host, and Joshua worships him as God. The Angel of Jehovah speaks unto the children of Israel at Bochim, and they

weep at his utterances. Gideon, the wife of Manoah, and Manoah himself, successively beheld the same Angel. Isaiah declared that "his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of hosts." The Voice of God is heard audibly by Elijah. A wondrous vision of God having been seen by Ezekiel, he adds, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of One that spake."

"No man hath seen God at any time." "None can see God's face and live." These appearances, then, must have been manifestations of the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity, and anticipations of His assumption of man's nature, in order to reconcile him to God. Meanwhile, however, they were instances of the Divine condescension to man, "broken lights of Him," and preludes to the Great Theophany, to that seeing by the eyes, and handling by the hand, the Word of Life, which is recorded in the New Testament. They were, in effect, an accommodation of Himself on the part of God to His creature's powers of apprehension of Him. And no one need stumble at this word, *accommodation*. It may indeed be interpreted, lending oneself to evil. A man sometimes accommodates his tone to his society; if he finds

himself in bad society, he adopts that tone, and speaks and acts as a bad man. This is of course objectionable. A man sometimes explains away a precept, and warps it to his own unrighteous purposes. This is again objectionable. But a man forbears to display his strength among the weak, or his learning so as to overawe the simple, or his high motives of action to those who cannot appreciate them, or his dignity and rank among the unpretending. This is not objectionable; it is the courtesy of the truly strong, the truly wise, the truly noble. So Lancelot is described in Tennyson:—

> "Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
> Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
> Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
> Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
> But kindly man, moving among his kind."

And a man takes an equitable interpretation of a law, not confining himself or constraining others to the mere rigid letter, but entering into the spirit of the enactor, and the varying circumstances of those for whom it appears to have been enacted. This, again, is not objectionable; it is the argument of Portia, not the doctrine of Shylock, and I have ventured to defend and adopt it in my Fifth Lecture. Now it is in a righteous sense of the word accommo-

dation, that God—I speak it with reverence—lends Himself, or condescends, to the weakness of man. He does not in any instance lower the tone of His moral requirement, or issue a positive precept which, when examined and seen in its full scope and tendency, is opposed to the moral sense. Against this view of His administration I have earnestly contended. He does not, again, allow Himself to be satisfied with a half or hypocritical performance of His commands. This is evidenced by His rejection of Saul's "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord," and of the "Corban" justification for filial ingratitude in the New Testament. Whatever will, whatever substance is sacrificed to Him, must be entire and unreserved. He no more lends or accommodates Himself to an outside morality than He does to a perverted morality. But this—again I speak it with reverence—He does do. High and pure and wise as He is in His own nature, He condescends to the lower nature of His creatures. He makes allowance and provides for the weak faculties of the young, whether young in their tenure of life, as children, or young in the age of the world, as the Israelites, who know Him but imperfectly, by educationally furnishing them with motives short of the highest. Bye

and bye they will serve Him better. He commends the service which would do more, but as yet cannot, by noticing the "two mites," by the gracious commendation, "she hath done what she could," and by the words, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." And, what in this place is most to our purpose, He condescends even to speak of Himself and His attributes in terms, and to manifest Himself in a form or under figures, which appear to lessen the distance separating the creature from the Creator—the learner from his Great Master—the earthly from the Heavenly.

That God appears in the Bible exhibiting this condescension, so far from furnishing an objection to its inspiration, rather proves its original from God. The Theist, if he speaks of God at all, must speak of Him after the manner of men, must conceive of His providence, and justice, and other attributes, and indeed express them, after the manner of men. And, if he will admit even the possibility of a revelation from God to men, respecting Himself and His attributes, and His interference in human affairs, he must admit that such a revelation would be worse than useless, unless it to a certain extent adopted the language in which those affairs, and interference in them, are usually spoken of.

Besides, if this were not so, God's possession of Omniscience would be contradicted. The Supreme Lord would not understand the motives of the beings with whom He has to do. The Great Artificer would not understand His own work, or how, if that work has been deranged or impaired, it may either, though impaired, be still carried on, or be readjusted and restored, whether perfectly or imperfectly, to its normal condition.

And it will not at all invalidate the view thus taken, but rather confirm it, that while another Dispensation was being inaugurated, God manifested Himself for thirty and more years in the flesh, that is, in a comparatively permanent anthropomorphic manner. For, besides the necessity of this towards the accomplishing the scheme of Redemption, with which we are not concerned at present, it subserved another grand purpose. It satisfied the anxiety which had been felt for ages and generations to be assured that God could be touched with a feeling for man's infirmities. A Divine Person was seen, as a Man, under the conditions of suffering humanity, and seen for so long a time, by so many witnesses, and under so great a variety of circumstances, as to relieve in a great measure all doubt. And what if that Divine Person

appeared to die as other men die? What if, though He rose again, and after having for forty days manifested Himself as a man, He has gone away, and caused all anthropomorphic manifestations of Himself, save perhaps those to St. Stephen, St. Paul, and St. John, to cease? What if, very shortly after His removal, all direct revelations of His Will by spoken or written word were brought to an end? Do these facts render it less necessary that the older manifestations should have been made? I answer, by no means. The inauguration process was not completed until a grand connecting fact had taken place, the Ascension. That was seen by credible witnesses. Henceforth, the Manhood is with God, and in God, for ever. There is no human want or fear which does not find its echo in the Great Human Heart of Christ in God; and He is ever sending His Spirit to aid, to comfort, to chasten, as His erring creatures require.

Christ in God, and God in Christ,—Christ, God the Son, and Son of God, yet Son of Man, and capable of being touched with a feeling of man's infirmities,—supplies that object of united worship and love, for which man has ever yearned, interprets God's anticipatory acts and words and appearances of condescension to

man, bridges over the gulf which was cleft by sin between man and his Maker. It is perhaps foreign to our immediate purpose, but I cannot help rehearsing those words of adoring thankfulness uttered by St. Paul, and praying that everyone who, like our objector, has misinterpreted God's Old Testament condescension to man, may be raised by them to its true meaning. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. viii. 33—35, 37—39.)

But to return.

The doctrine of accommodation as I have endeavoured to set it forth, has been mercifully

applied, or permitted to be applied, by the Almighty, in the Bible, to other matters besides description of Himself. And this for a reason different from that which I have mentioned hitherto, although it may also fairly be alleged as a reason for what is said of Himself. The Bible is intended for all men,—not for the philosopher only, but for persons in ordinary life. Therefore, when the Bible speaks of matters of science, as of subjects which fall under the departments of astronomy, of geology, of natural history, and the like, it employs in a vast number of instances such phrases as will just serve to indicate the phenomena intended, without causing the reader to pause, either to consider what the words ought to mean, or to enter upon the question, do they convey a rigidly correct view of the phenomena or no. For the object of the Bible is not to teach us how God works in the world of nature, but the way in which man may be made like Him in holiness. It would, therefore, be foreign to its purpose, to aim at strict accuracy, by the employment of expressions which, though correct in themselves, are not the expressions ordinarily current. Men speak of things as they appear. The uneducated, because they have not time or ability to look beneath the surface; the

educated, because scientific language would be periphrastic, would be troublesome to themselves, would be unintelligible to the mass of mankind. So, the Bible, intended for man, speaks of things merely as they appear. Of the sun and moon as rising, though they only appear to rise, of the hare as ruminating, though it only appears to ruminate, and the like. Thus, as the representation of God in an anthropomorphic manner removes man's moral fear of approaching Him; the description of the natural world in popular language prevents, in the case of educated persons an intellectual snare, in the case of uneducated persons an intellectual difficulty. The former are not drawn away in their perusal of the Bible from topics of momentous personal interest to subjects which are merely incidental. The latter are not compelled to give up their perusal of it in despair of comprehending its perhaps correct, but certainly unfamiliar phraseology.

I think it better to confess at once that the doctrine of accommodation is really at the bottom of the alleged unscientific expressions in Scripture, than to endeavour, as some have done, absolutely to reconcile those expressions with science. Attempts at such reconcilement, besides being unnecessary, often produce

new difficulties. I will just adduce two instances, which, though made with the best intentions, had better have been left alone. They will be found in a book written recently in defence of the Bible. The former of them relates to Joshua's command to the sun and moon to stand still. The apologist urges, that the word translated *Sun*, should be rendered *Sunlight;* that the word translated *Moon*, should be rendered *Moonlight;* and that therefore, not the bodies themselves were caused to stand still, but the undulations of ether excited by the sun were miraculously sustained by the Creator at the creature's word—the luminary itself, and the moon also, being unaffected. It is needless to observe, that this explanation only introduces the possibility of one miracle instead of another into the field of debate, and that it does not in the least meet the question, why is the term standing-still applied to the sun, which, with the light caused by it, does not move, but only appears to move.

The latter of the two instances addresses itself, not to removing incorrectness, but to asserting absolute correctness of scientific statement in the Bible. God, says our author, promised to man dominion over all the earth, by which would be meant the land and sea; God

did not promise to him—in fact, He withheld from him—dominion over the air. And then, he proceeds, this promise and this interdiction have, both of them, been strictly observed. Man has had dominion over the land and sea from the beginning; but it is evident that over the air he has never obtained dominion. Well, we will pass over the assumption that navigation has always existed, though it would be difficult to prove that point; we will admit that the account that our author goes on to give of the futility of man's efforts to "make the clouds his chariot" is very interesting, and that up to the date of his book, in the autumn of last year, it had been found impossible to utilize the balloon. But, after what has occurred recently in a neighbouring country, as to the employment of that means of travelling, what becomes of his argument, that the Bible is scientifically correct, on the plea that man has never done, what a certain passage in it, if forced to a certain sense, declares him not to be intended to do?

The real reply to such difficulties is recourse to the doctrine of accommodation.

The Parables of our Blessed Lord afford an additional exemplification of the use of the same doctrine. A scriptural parable, by its very nature, is an illustration of God's dealings,

by the dealings of men with each other—of the things of faith, by the things of sense. The latter must be in many cases inadequate to represent the former. Such a parable, therefore, necessitates something like accommodation, something like anthropomorphic description. God's sitting on the throne of His glory: The right hand and the left hand of the Judge: Dialogues between the Arraigner and the arraigned: Expression of the feelings of the evil soul in the separate state, before the reunion of soul and body, in terms belonging to the body: The phrase, "While men slept," as if God slept while Satan was at work: The question, "Whence then has it tares?" as if God, the Sower of the good seed, did not know who was the sower of evil seed: The fear, "Lest with the tares ye root up the wheat also," as if God could not discriminate:—all these, and the like, are so many instances of illustration of things out of sight by employment of the language of men.

What is the effect of them? They tend to strengthen our argument that the Bible and its teaching are not invalidated by such employment, but rather established thereby to be of Divine origination. They show that God, though He be high and lifted up, can conde-

scend to the weakness of His creatures, and that, knowing both of what they are made, and what they have made themselves, He speaks in terms that they can understand.

Five verses of the Book of Wisdom may be commended to our objector's serious thought—

"For what man is he that can know the counsel of God? or who can think what the Will of the Lord is? For the thoughts of mortal man are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain. For the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth on many things. And hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon the earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us; but the things that are in heaven who hath searched out? And Thy counsel, who hath known, except Thou give wisdom, and send Thy Holy Spirit from above?"—(Wisd. ix. 13—17.)

LECTURE VIII.

JOHN viii. 46.

Which of you convinceth Me of sin?

THERE is no authentic delineation of the outward form and appearance of our Blessed Lord. There is not even such an historical description of Him as might serve to suggest what His physical semblance was. Why this should have been so,—why in this matter "the instincts of earthly affection seem to have been mysteriously overruled,"—we know not. It may be, because He who sympathised with every blameless phase of the character and career of man, his hopes, his fears, his joys, his sorrows, would have been represented inadequately and unsatisfyingly by any one fixed expression of countenance. He looked about Him with anger at His accusers' hardness in the synagogue. He glanced reproval on Peter's weakness in the hall of Caiaphas. His eye dwelt with love on the young

man who asked, though with a divided heart, how eternal life was to be obtained. His cheerful presence adorned and beautified the marriage at Cana. He shed tears at the anguish of the mourners over Lazarus, and at His own thoughts on Jerusalem's approaching ruin. He was sorrowful, even unto death, in Gethsemane. He was transfigured on the holy mount to a most excellent glory. Under which of these aspects, in which of these attitudes, was He to be set forth to us by painter or sculptor? If one of them was to be selected in especial, and to be placed in our hands for ever, might it not have been inferred that the others, in which He was no less a type to the Christian, were, by the very fact of such selection, of less moment, and to be rejected? It may be, that the tendency to dwell exclusively upon what was specially human and local in Him, which He more than once rebuked, was intended to be tacitly discouraged, by the withholding of what the middle ages termed the "Volto Santo" of the Saviour. Or the case may be—as is beautifully suggested by the authoresses[1] of "The History of Our Lord, as exemplified in Works of Art"—He whom all races of men were to call brother, was not to be too closely associ-

[1] Mrs. Jameson and Lady Eastlake; p. 31.

ated with the particular lineaments of any one race. East and West, Byzantium and Rome, Spain, Italy, Germany, and every Christian nation, might imagine a form of the Son of Man not altogether unaccordant with their respective ideas of beauty, dignity, and love.

Be this, however, as it may, it is far otherwise with regard to the moral delineation of our Lord. This we possess in its integrity. It has been set forth, once for all, in the Gospels. It may not be added to or subtracted from. It requires no finishing touches: it has no harshness to be toned or softened down. It is so transcendental as to defy attempts at improvement,—so archetypal as to condemn, by its chasteness and perfectness, attempts to assimilate it to any lower standard. Others may have been men of sorrows, but their sorrows have been ever mingled with sin: He was a Man of Sorrows, but without sin.

And this being so, it is not merely with exquisite pain, but with an almost indignant sense of the unworthiness of the representation, that the well-instructed Christian peruses that work of Renan which is entitled *Vie de Jésus*. "The purely fictitious and somewhat immoral hero of an Oriental romance, fashioned to the taste of a modern Parisian public," is

what Renan sees in Christ, says a recent and vigorous writer.[1] Strong as his words are, they are scarcely overcharged. For in that work the Divine Utterer of the words of my text, so far from being represented as God, or as the Son of God, does not even rise to the level of perfect Humanity. He is a man of an impulsive, enthusiastic constitution, who believes himself to have an internal mission to reform the world. For a while, he exhibits himself as unusually holy, exalted, and unselfish. But at length, under the force of circumstances, and from inability to control his followers, he lends himself to schemes more than questionable. Of this lowering of himself the romancer adduces a number of specimens, one of them a most discreditable specimen. "With all this, however, and in spite of all this," (Renan proceeds complacently,) "he was a great and good man, as compared with the generality of heroes, and he died for persisting in his views. But he did not die, till he had succeeded in founding a society, designated after himself. He lives, and his name lives, in his disciples."

Such is the Christ of Renan, divested of the embellishments by which he has disguised the intrinsic poverty of the conception; for a miser-

[1] Liddon, Bampton Lectures, p. 22.

able conception it is of our Blessed Lord and Saviour. How it entered into his heart to imagine it, his own words enable us to determine, to a certain extent; they do not do so entirely, for they scarcely reach back beyond the time when he took in hand the task of accounting for the existence of the Christian religion, as a phenomenon which could not be ignored. Nevertheless, they are worth quoting. "Many will regret, perhaps, the biographical form which my work has taken. When I first conceived the idea of a history of the origin of Christianity, what I wished to write was, in fact, a history of doctrines, in which men and their actions would hardly have had a place. Jesus would scarcely have been named; I should have endeavoured to show how the ideas which have grown under his name took root and covered the world. But I have learned since, that history is not a simple game of abstractions; that men are more than doctrines. It was not a certain theory on justification and redemption which brought about the Reformation; it was Luther and Calvin."[1] We would fain gather from this passage that he did not intend his portraiture to be so injurious or so blasphemous as it

[1] Renan, "Vie de Jésus," Introd. p. 54; in Transl. p. 31.

appears to all who have mastered the Gospels thoroughly, and who know and value the Christ who is actually found there. We would even fain believe, that he did not conscientiously adopt it as a declension from the Christian side. And it were, at any rate, kind and charitable to entertain, until they are disproved, some suppositions like the following. That it may have been to him, something like an advance from the perplexities of that vague Theism, however he had drifted into it, which displays itself in his introductory address to the spirit of his departed sister. That it may have been a sort of desperate, convulsive grasping, like that of a drowning man,—through, intermediately, the idea of a mythical Christ—of the idea, how unworthy and godless soever, of an actual Christ. That it may have been, therefore, a movement towards the Christian side. And that so, it may be hoped for him, and for those who, after being in similar perplexity, have come only this little way out of mere Theism, that they will eventually be induced to come further.

Were I treating of Renan specifically, and of the case of those whose course may in this way have run parallel to his, I should, in accordance with the view propounded in my First Lecture,

have given him and them credit for such sincerity as could in fairness be attributed to them And it would have been my duty to throw myself in thought, into their position, and to endeavour to discover from what unsatisfied yearnings, from what "hunger of heart," that portraiture of Christ originated, or has been by some welcomed, and accepted, at least for a time. For, no doubt, (I say this from instances within my own knowledge,)there are some, previously admiring readers of the *Leben Jesu* of Strauss, to whom it has supplied their first realization of Christ as, in any correct sense of the word, a Person. And then I should have gone on to show that it was impossible to pause there, and why. But I have declined at present, lest my field of discussion should thereby be too enlarged, to enter upon the case of those who are thus groping their way from Theism into Christianity. I am concerned with those who seem to be in danger of losing their Christianity and falling into Theism, in consequence of difficulties which their moral sense finds, or thinks it finds, in the Bible. Among these there are certainly many, to whom Renan's work, whatever his intentions may have been, has proved a most grievous stumbling-block. Being ill instructed in the Bible, they have taken their idea of Christ

from the *Vie de Jésus*, have imagined the portrait given there to be fairly drawn from the Gospels, and so have failed to recognize in Him the lineaments even of a Perfect Man. Hence their moral sense has been offended, their faith has been endangered, their hopes have been shattered. They have closed Renan's book despondingly and sadly, and, without waiting to compare it with a Better Book, have exclaimed, Could Christ have been a Sacrifice for sin, who was not, so far as we can see, a consistent example of godly life?

I would endeavour to-day, to direct such persons back from the *Vie de Jésus*, which I shall show to be rather "a sick man's dream" than a biography, properly so called, to the reality of the Divine Man of the New Testament. I believe that the deadening doubts which they have experienced will make their eventual faith, so hardly attained, firmer and more lively; for as Tennyson beautifully said, though he somewhat qualified his own saying, almost immediately after he had uttered it,—

> "I hold it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things."

But to our subject.

No one, who has studied Renan's work with attention, can help discovering that he labours under certain peculiarities of mental and moral temperament, which must have rendered him very unfit for his self-chosen task. He is unable to estimate fairly the authority attaching to the Gospels. He cannot discover in their composition anything like a Divine guidance. The utmost that he can say of them is, that they are a collection of legends, dictated originally by partisanship, or by personal affection on the part of the writers for him whose biography they profess to record. He finds in them, a legitimate and proper subject for the critical knife and ink-horn to be employed upon. He has a bias against the admission of anything that is supernatural. He has not advanced far enough on his road to Christianity to desiderate for it a Divine Founder, in the true acceptation of that expression. All that he needs is, a founder, who, though possessed of some human alloy of infirmity, is endowed with, what he calls, high and divine qualities:—a founder, sufficiently attractive, from his benevolence and enthusiasm, to have become the nucleus round which men grouped themselves originally, and to which they still cling with attachment. Such a founder he thinks he discovers in a Christ, working no

miracles, but able, from his high personal character, to engage a large and devoted band of followers to listen to his teaching and to espouse his cause. But a difficulty meets him here. The Christ of the legends—for, as I have intimated, the Gospels are no more than this to him—is represented in them as working miracles. And miracles are so interwoven in the text of all the legends, that absolute excision or elimination of them is impossible. Fortunately, however, for his theory, they have been allowed by him to be but legends. No doubt, therefore, many facts in them which appear to have been miraculous were merely unusual occurrences, to which the imagination or zeal of the Christ's uncritical followers imparted a supernatural colouring. And if there were any occasions on which he professed to be able to work miracles, he was, on these occasions, a victim of circumstances, and was compelled to affect powers, supposed defect of which would have caused his following to melt away. Renan's mind sees in all this nothing whatever strange or unusual. From his own standpoint as a critic, he considers himself entitled to manipulate the Gospels, after this, as it would be generally termed, unceremonious and unscrupulous fashion. And, as he has proposed to himself, as his chief

object, to account for the success of a Christ in founding a certain sect, still existing, widely prevailing, and not to be ignored, called Christianity, he is not particularly troubled by the moral obliquity of some of the means by which such a Christ as he has supposed is enabled to found that sect.

But I have said he is not particularly troubled. He is somewhat troubled. He has to grapple with this inconvenient necessity. Christianity has to be accounted for as a dominion over men's hearts for their moral good, not merely as a dominion over men's bodies, or minds, or territories, for temporal purposes. How is this achieved? I will endeavour to explain. Renan allows the end which his Christ proposed, the foundation of Christianity, and the result attained, Christianity itself, to be good, to be transcendental. But, from some obliquity in his own moral constitution, he is not indisposed to admit that a good end may justify indifferent or even exceptionable means. And besides, as after all, his founder of Christianity, though an heroic man, is only a man, some deviations from strict rectitude may not unnaturally be expected. He regrets these deviations, indeed, but they exist. The climax of them is his Christ's lending himself to create

an impression that Lazarus was raised from the dead, though he was not so raised. This seems to us monstrous enough to destroy any theory of the excellence of his Christ's moral character. It does not seem so to Renan. Happily for his purpose, it occurs late in Christ's ministry, and his ingenuity has been at work throughout the rest of Christ's career. He has discovered a variety of other instances of deterioration in his hero's moral tone, and has gently noted them, one by one, giving them softened and subdued, or grave and sombre colouring, as his fancy suggested. At the same time, he has enveloped them with a halo of description and sentiment, which draws off too great attention from their repulsiveness. By degrees the scene of Bethany is reached. Here his Christ is further lowered in tone. One of those very hard obligations to compromise, which every founder of a society must submit to, so Renan puts it, comes upon him. What may be called a very trying abandonment of the high views of straightforwardness and integrity, with which every enthusiast commences his career, must be entertained by this enthusiast, or all is lost. The obligation is submitted to—the abandonment is entertained—and all is saved. I regretted those former deteriorations, Renan says, in effect, and

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I regret this, as I record it. But are they not all of them cast into the shade by the greatness of the end for which they were undertaken? Were they not all necessitated by the situation? He who would lead men, must be either like themselves, somewhat imperfect, or, what is much the same thing, must dissemble and appear to be imperfect.

You may think, perhaps, that I have misrepresented the mental and moral bias of Renan. Here then are his own words, "History is impossible, if we do not fully admit that there are many standards of sincerity. All great things are done through the people; now we can only lead the people by adapting ourselves to their ideas. The philosopher who, knowing this, isolates and fortifies himself in his integrity, is highly praiseworthy. But he who takes humanity in its illusions, and seeks to act with it and upon it, cannot be blamed. Cæsar knew well that he was not the son of Venus; France would not be what it is, if it had not for a thousand years believed in the Holy Ampulla of Rheims. It is easy for us, who are so powerless, to call this falsehood, and, proud of our timid honesty, to treat with contempt the heroes who have accepted the battle of life under other conditions. When we have effected by our

scruples what they accomplished by their falsehoods, we shall have the right to be severe upon them. At least, we must make a marked distinction between societies like our own, where everything takes place in the full light of reflection, and simple and credulous communities, in which the beliefs that have governed ages have been born. Nothing great has been established which does not rest upon a legend. The only culprit in such cases is the humanity which is willing so to be deceived."[1]

With a view of morality which thus justifies means by end; with a necessity, self-imposed, indeed, but demanded by his theory, that nothing supernatural should attach to Christ; with an equally stern necessity, also demanded by his theory, of leading gently up to, what the moral sense of mankind would at once repudiate, if baldly introduced, the palliating a false pretence to miraculous power; and with an inadequate appreciation of the trustworthiness of the Gospels; no wonder that Renan's biography of Christ is such as he has presented it. It could not have been expected, *à priori*, that with such peculiarities of mental and moral temperament, and with such a theory to main-

[1] Renan, "Vie de Jésus," chap. xvi. pp. 253–254; Transl. p. 187.

tain, he would exhibit to his readers "a Man without guile."

It does, however, at first sight, appear wonderful and almost inexplicable that persons professing to be Christians, and with the Gospels themselves, as a corrective, in their hands, should for a moment have felt perplexity, on reading such a romance. That they have done so, is a fact. I will try to assign some reasons for it.

Perhaps the main reason is this. People do not read the Bible systematically, or they read it without reflection. In especial, they do not read the Gospels systematically, or compare them together, or form any adequate conception of the consistency of Christ's character, and of the perfect beauty and symmetry, so to speak, of His moral features. Even good sort of people are contented, very often, to read their daily chapter, without thinking of its connection with the chapter of yesterday, or the chapter of to-morrow. Many scarcely read them at all, in private, and gather nearly all their knowledge of them from a weekly attendance at church. In defect of a living knowledge of the Gospels continually refreshed, they have fallen back on their childish recollections of analyses and catechisms, which, it may be, were their chief ori-

ginal sources of information. And thus they have lost all apprehension of the inner life and vigour of the Gospels, and of the manner in which the character of Christ is brought out by their united testimony. They only possess an outline of it—and that outline has not much that is interesting.

The biography of Christ is thus, through their own fault or their own misfortune, rendered, though most interesting in itself, most thoroughly uninviting. They retain, however, an idea that they ought to be interested in it. Renan's work falls into their hands. Its subject attracts their notice—its descriptive and highly embellished style retains it. What little they already know of Christ gives them a sufficient substratum of facts to assure them that Renan is not drawing altogether upon his imagination. But the inaccuracy of their knowledge renders them unable to judge whether he is grouping the facts fairly, or giving them their due weight in the narrative, or drawing justifiable inferences from them. They have been thrown off their guard by his profession that he admits the Gospels, and their critical powers are not ordinarily sufficient to enable them to ascertain either the degree in which his admission is qualified, or the effect which

the qualification will produce upon the narrative. He seems to give reliable references as he goes on, and thus they are convinced that he cannot be travelling out of the record. By little and little, they become greatly interested in the fortunes of the hero of the story—the liking which they naturally feel for an agreeable and highly wrought narrative being combined with the flattering feeling, that they are doing well in being interested in One whose name they bear, but in whom they never felt so much interest before. Then, they come more entirely under the writer's spell—look at the hero exclusively from his point of view—fall in with his remarks on the several situations in which the hero is placed—and with his passing comments on his acts and character. Sometimes, perhaps, these remarks and comments clash with their previous impressions, but these previous impressions are hazy and indistinct—and they say, Perhaps, after all, we were wrong. Thus they are led on insensibly—and though other remarks and comments occur, which they do not quite like, they are less and less struck by them. The imperfections of Christ, as represented by the writer, do not repel them. They read on to the end—then at length the charm is broken. The Christ of Renan is dead

—and does not rise again—does not ascend intc heaven—does not sit there as perfect Man, and perfect God. How, indeed, could he, if he was only that imperfect man, if he was only that sort of Christ, whom they have indolently admitted to be identical with the Christ of the Gospels? Such a Christ, a person of worldly policy, could not have been "the Just put to death for the unjust." Mistaking, then, Renan's Christ for the Christ of the Gospels, they either cast in their lot with Renan, or when they find that the rest of Christians still believe in a Christ, who is not Renan's, they give up Christianity altogether, and take refuge in Natural Religion. In this latter case, the dream of the romance being over, their moral sense repudiates an imperfect Christ, and false pride and indolence combine, unless they are especially urged, and especially put upon the right track, to render them unwilling to confess that they may have been mistaken, and to search the veritable documents for a perfect Christ.

A short analysis, for no more can be attempted, of the manner in which "He whom none have ever convinced of sin" has been set forth by Renan, and a still shorter exhibition of the true outline of the Divine Man, may be useful. They may at any rate indicate a clew

which, under God's blessing, may be taken in hand by these perplexed doubters. Those who look on this picture and on that, must, if not at once, yet eventually, come to the conclusion, that the Christ of Renan is not the Christ of Scripture. That he is no more the Man of the Canonical Gospels, than the perverse and self-willed child of the Apocryphal Gospels is that Child of Scripture, who, with high thoughts burning within Him, and His "Father's business" opening and already inchoate, went down to Nazareth, and was subject to Joseph and Mary.

It is with Christ's early childhood that Renan's misapprehensions of the perfection of His Humanity begin. Of course he ignores His Divine Sonship, and makes Him the son of Joseph. But with this defect in his system, radical as it is, we have, at this moment, nothing at all to do. It is more to our purpose to observe that Christ appears in his pages to have been from his infancy in revolt against parental authority, to have cared little for his family, and at times to have been hard towards them. His obedient going down to Nazareth, his subjection to Joseph and Mary, his working at Joseph's craft, his parting charge to John to provide for Mary, are all forgotten. And his

disclaimers of the ties of kindred when brought into competition with duty, are tortured into instances of trampling under foot everything that is human, blood, love, and country.

Still, in spite of these alleged drawbacks to Christ's early goodness, he is represented by Renan as, up to a certain point, most high in his views, most pure in his morality, most winning in his manners, most unselfish and unambitious in his precepts. The charms of the natural world of Palestine, in the midst of which he walked and worked, and which Renan picturesquely describes, are more than equalled by the moral charms of the character of the developing and developed man. But at this point in his career, which in Renan's arrangement seems to precede his Baptism, Christ's perfection is made obviously to decline. "As yet, indeed," says the writer, "there were no Christians; though true Christianity was founded, and doubtless was never more perfect than at this first period. Jesus added nothing durable afterwards. Indeed, in one sense he compromised it; for every movement, in order to triumph, must make sacrifices; we never come from the contest of life unscathed. To conceive the good, in fact, is not sufficient; it must be made to succeed

amongst men. To accomplish this, less pure paths must be followed. Certainly, if the Gospel were confined to some chapters of Matthew and Luke it would be more perfect, and would not now be open to so many objections; but would Jesus have converted the world without miracles? If he had died at the period of his career we have now reached, there would not have been in his life a single page to wound us; but, greater in the eyes of God, he would have remained unknown to men."

This is a very remarkable passage. It more than insinuates that the Christ of the romance succeeded only because he wrought miracles: that he found out the necessity of miracles at a particular time: that he did not work them, but pretended to work them: and that this compromise of morality, though it detracts from the absolute truthfulness and beauty of his character, is justifiable because it led to great and important results.

All this, however, is but a prelude on Renan's part to his allegation of particular instances of declining moral tone on the part of his Christ. His hero presently appears adopting many things, which were not in accordance with his ideas, or for which he cared little, because they were popular: acquiring a consciousness of his

originality: and becoming hurt by the influence of John the Baptist. He has much darkness mixed with even his most correct views: his mind is sometimes crossed by strange temptations: yet he proceeds with a kind of "fatal impassibility in the path marked out by his astonishing genius." He allows with pleasure the title of "the Messiah" to be given to him, though he knew it was not his: he draws from the chapter of Isaiah which he reads publicly in the synagogue at Capernaum a lesson in conformity with his own ideas, though, (but this is only covertly suggested,) the interpretation of the passage was a false one. Though unable to work a miracle at Nazareth, (the true reason for which is suppressed, want of faith on the part of the Nazarenes,) he gradually believes more in himself the more he finds the people believe in him: and he goes on to allow them to believe, (in order to satisfy the ideas of the time, which, however, says the writer, coincided with his own ideas,) that a revelation from on high discovered to him all secrets, and laid bare all hearts.

Nor is this all. The process of deterioration goes on. The Christ of Renan allows children to claim for him publicly the dignity of the Messiah, which, though not belonging to him

of right, he had privately admitted by not disclaiming it, and henceforth he becomes less scrupulous daily in his assumption of that character. Under the necessity of impassioned conflict, he practises two entirely opposite rules of proselytism, at one time welcoming those who are not actively against him, as his friends, at another asserting, Those who are not for me are against me. If he is well disposed to Samaria, this is merely from a spirit of opposition to the Jews, and so for party purposes. He is open to flattery, for he performs miracles, or performs them most readily, if he is addressed as "the Son of David," though his descent from that king was a fiction. At length, he reaches a crisis in his career, when it is absolutely necessary to choose between renouncing his mission, and becoming an habitual *thaumaturgus*, or worker of marvels, and he selects, not without scruple and a hard struggle, perhaps, but still he selects, the latter alternative. The imagination of those who resort to him for miraculous interference assists him a great deal in maintaining his part—but he countenances it himself by word and by deed. At length he condescends to a dramatic imposture, and at his bidding, a person who was not really dead is caused to rise from the grave.

Bye and bye, it may be from consciousness of loss of reality, his natural gentleness seems to abandon him; he is occasionally hasty and capricious: his disciples do not at times understand him, and experience in his presence a feeling akin to fear: sometimes his displeasure at the slightest opposition leads him to commit inexplicable, and apparently absurd acts. Contact with men has degraded him to their level.

It is at Bethany, as has been already remarked, that the morality of Renan's Christ is at its worst. "His conscience" (says the writer) "had lost something of its original purity. Desperate, and driven to extremity, he was no longer his own master. His mission overwhelmed him, and he yielded to the torrent. As always happens in the lives of great and inspired men, he suffered the miracles opinion demanded of him, rather than performed them."

Such, for I will not pain you or myself by carrying on the delineation with more minuteness, is the Christ of Renan, given as nearly as possible, in his own words. And now, I would ask, can any sane man, who will take the trouble to inform himself on the subject, imagine that this is the Christ of Scripture, about whom and to whom the love and admi-

ration of Christians have clustered and clung for more than eighteen centuries? Let him read the *Life of Christ*, by our own sainted writer Jeremy Taylor, the minute analysis of every act in the career of the Redeemer by Isaac Williams, Stier's *Words of the Lord Jesus*, Pressensé's *Jésus-Christ, son temps, sa vie, son œuvre*, or most recently the *Christ of the Gospels*, by Professor Schaff, and he will certainly be disillusionized. But better still, let him go humbly, and teachably, and, I will add, prayerfully, to the Gospels themselves, the Gospels unglossed, unpruned, and permitted to tell their own story.

To depict Christ in His true light as a Perfect Man would be to traverse the whole surface of the Gospels. No other words than their own can represent His pure life, and the entire consistency of it from the moment when He begins to "increase in wisdom and stature, and is in favour with God and man," to the day when a cloud received Him out of the sight of His adoring disciples. He is ever loving, considerate, affectionate, ever doing good to others, ever forgetful of Himself; so that He may do His Father's work of evangelizing the world. He has a dignity, an equableness of temper, far removed from that fitfulness and waywardness

with which Renan invests Him. He has a consciousness of power which places Him far above any necessity of taking occasions to appear powerful. As for miracles, He withholds or performs them, with a view to moral effects, and not with the object of self-aggrandisement. As a rule, He rather performed them in private, than sought for multitudes who should be attracted by them. So far from suppressing His own views, or adapting Himself to the prejudices of others, He is remarkable for a transparent sincerity of word and action which often offended His followers. So far from seeking to gather round Him a band of adherents, to be retained by indifferent motives, He was absolutely careless of gaining any except from the highest motives. So far from pretending to dive into persons' hearts, He exercised a quiet and felt power, which many acknowledged, of actually doing so. And, as to His deterioration in character, what He was at the very beginning, such He continued to the very end, calm and deliberate in action, patient and unreplying under provocation, not elevated by success, not depressed by temporary failure, gentle and compassionate to the humble and the mourner, uncompromising in His rebuffs of the hypocrite, not courting dangers or trials,

and not shunning them when they fell in His path; a specimen, such as the world has never seen, of liberal, laborious, forgiving, patient, suffering love. He was an embodiment of that Charity described by St. Paul, we may be sure not without a mental vision of Him whom that great Apostle "loved and whom he served," and whom he had before him when he said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ."

Such a Christ, I may say to the objector, who has mistaken for Him, that mixture of enthusiasm and despondency, of self-deceit and deception of others, of high aims and grovelling performances, which appears in the pages of Renan, one may discover in the Gospels. He is a Man before whose perfections all other men must bow—a Man, whose means were as noble as His objects were noble—He is a Man whom it were as impossible not to believe to have been God manifest in the flesh, as it is impossible to believe that Renan's Christ could have founded the pure system of ethics set forth by Christianity, and much more that he could have ascended from earth to the bosom of pure Deity.

It is in itself a sad and evil case not to believe everything high and holy of the Man Christ Jesus, our model for this present world

—our hope in heaven—both God and Man. There is, however, "some soul of goodness" in those who see the imperfections of the false Christ, and who turn themselves resolutely from the "blurred and shredded" Gospel of Renan to the pages of Scripture undefiled. Let them prayerfully commence their study, and "Who is He, that I may believe in Him?" will be answered fully, answered marvellously, and beyond their most sanguine hope. Some, it is to be feared, there are who dare not believe in a perfect Christ. Such a Christ must render their own lives, if they call themselves Christians at all, a pretence and a lie. They hate Him, as Ahab hated Micaiah, because He doth not prophesy good concerning them, but evil. But, in the words of a thoughtful poet, with which I would conclude my addresses at this time :—

"I tax not all with this unmanly hate
Of truth, for purer spirits stand without—
Meek men of reverent purpose, watch and wait,
And gaze in sorrow from the land of doubt.
Yes, gentle souls there be, who hold apart,
And long in silence for the day of grace ;
For deep in many a brave, though bleeding heart,
There lurks a yearning for the Healer's face—
A yearning to be free from hint and guess,
To take the blessings Christ is fain to give :
To all who dare not with their conscience strive,
To all who burn for this most dear success,
Faith shall be born ! and, by her natural stress,
Push through these dark philosophies, and live ! "

Amen.

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